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HALF IN EARNEST

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:: BY MURIEL HINE ::



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TO MY FATHER,
GEORGE THOMAS HINE.

"That which is not for the interest of the whole swarm is not for the interest of the single bee."

Marcus Aurelius.

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonised?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue
thence?"

Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should be prized?"

Robert Browning.

"For while a youth is lost in soaring thought,
And while a maid grows sweet and beautiful,
And while a spring-tide coming lights the earth,
And while a child, and while a flower is born,
And while one wrong cries for redress and finds
A soul to answer, still the world is young!"

Lewis Morris.

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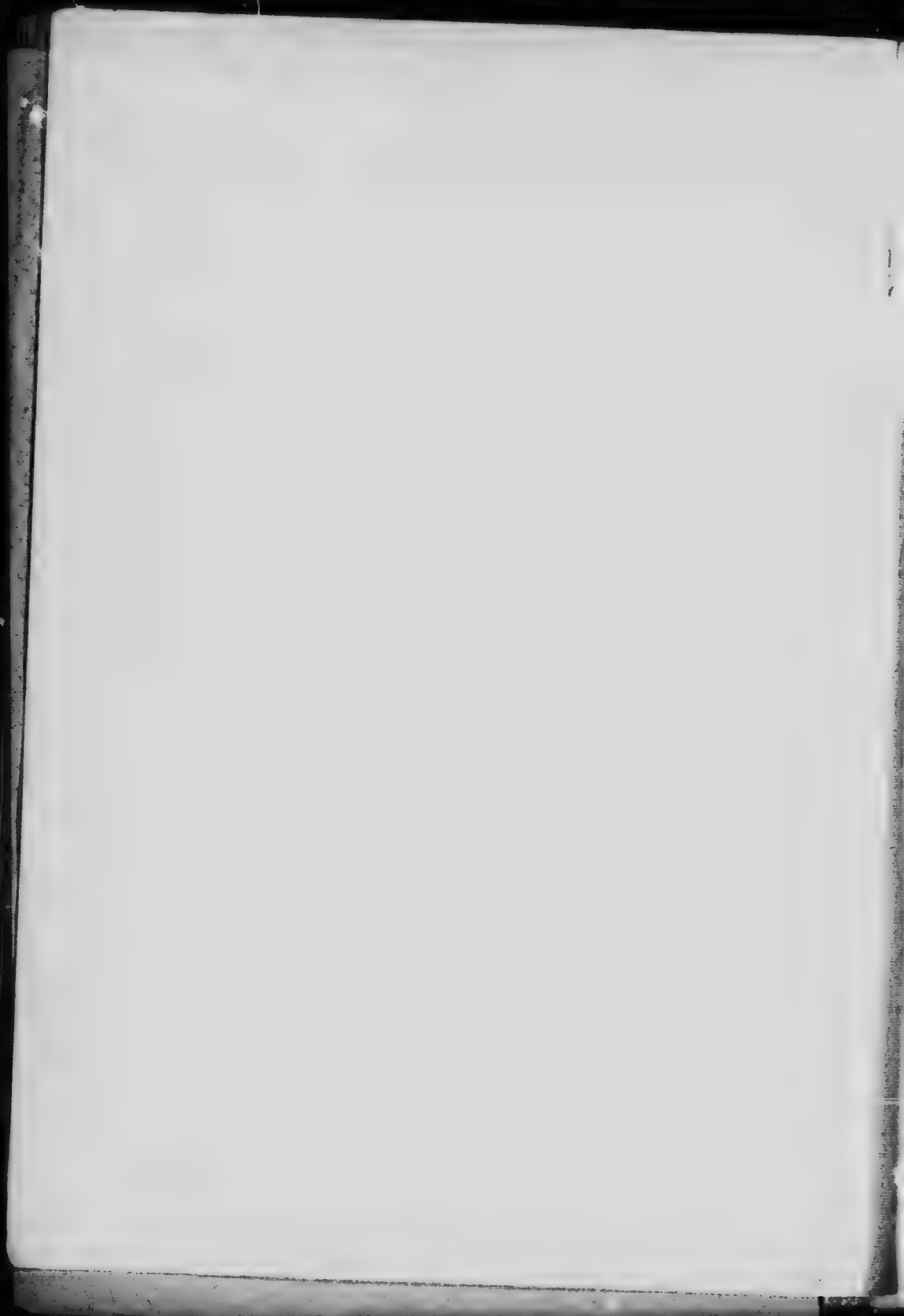
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PART I.
LOVE IN THE SUNSHINE

HALF IN EARNEST

CHAPTER I

"You are free."

He repeated the words aloud for the sheer joy of hearing them spoken; threw them with all the force of his strong young lungs into the clearness of the Southern air.

And the beauty of the day seemed to deepen, blue sky and the changing tones of the dancing waves below, the flash of green as a lizard darted across a shelf of the white cliff where he lay; all the colours accentuating, the glory spreading, as though the fair earth smiled back at him her laughing message of sympathy.

"Free!"—It was all so simple, so unexpected, this rending asunder of the heavy chains that bound him; the one honourable "way out" which had never presented itself to his hard-pressed ingenuity.

That she—of all women!—cold, undemonstrative, as he had learnt to know her under that delicate mask of hers, should in the early years of a still lovely middle age, be "gathered into the Church"—he glanced down at the letter on his knee—and there find "consolation and happiness."

He closed his eyes for a moment with a little sigh of amusement and relief.

He could picture the fervour with which she would throw herself blindly into the hands of the priest.

Her nature, emotional sooner than passionate, would find in the embolism and mystery of the Roman Church food for her perpetual craving for excitement.

Love to her had ever been a means, not an end, a bond to hold his faithful services, not the motive force of their five years of intimacy.

It was the realisation of this that had lowered his estimate of womanhood, tainting the glory of this first strong passion of his by the mere suggestion of a bargain.

He had been her bond-slave, devotedly, faithfully, and at the end wearily, up to the furthest limits of secret indifference.

Now, of her own accord, "to save her soul alive," she had sacrificed him on the altar of her new religion.

There came a fierce rustle in the aloes by his side. He raised himself on his elbow to see an aggressive lizard dart after its companion into a crevice of the rock.

"Always fighting," he thought lazily as he lighted another cigarette and a smile touched the corners of his clean-cut mouth. "It breaks the monotony, I expect!"

Then back again to his train of thought, his eyes, unseeing, far out across the blue waters, his mind in the grey of an English afternoon.

He could picture her now, as she sat there writing at the high satinwood table; the light falling on the smooth coils of dark hair, parted over the low forehead above those misleading, thoughtful eyes.

With the completeness of detail, which is the

lover's prerogative, he could fancy the muscles rounding in her slim white neck as she bent over her letter, the arched eyebrows slightly frowning, in the effort of concentration.

In a minute, he knew, she would blot the page carefully, re-read it once, wipe the pen with fastidious care on a little piece of chamois in the top right-hand drawer, and seal the envelope with mauve wax and an engraved stamp with a bay-leaf, "for friendship;" then push her chair back with a smile of virtue rewarded.

He knew, he knew, he knew!—as he had known all these wearisome years precisely, without a varying shadow of doubt, what she would do, how she would look, the words she would say!

That was the crux of the whole matter—her utter want of variety.

Had her nature been deeper, notwithstanding, she could have held him by his intellect.

But under the grace and charm of her appearance, enhanced by her well-assured position as wife to the clever politician and the dazzling favour of her patronage to the young fellow fresh from his college life, she held no reserves of wit or originality.

She was just Lady Mary Dirke; supremely contented in the fact.

The only secret in her orthodox mechanism was a hidden craving for excitement.

This, Derrick Kilmarny, good to look upon and easy to entertain, supplied.

At first as an offering to a far off, wonderful goddess. Later, after she had stepped down from her pedestal in a reaction from supreme boredom, and he had realised, with something of a shock, the human in the divine, he had thrown himself into the affair with all the fervour of untried youth—the

fire that burns itself out from very force of fierceness. And the inevitable had resulted.

After five years of a bond that seemed unbreakable in the daily intimacy of his position as secretary to Julian Dirke, during his short holiday in Italy the unexpected had occurred, and Lady Mary had set him free.

Free, free, free! He laughed aloud in sheer animal spirits and as he did so a little shower of pebbles fell down on him where he lay on his ledge of rock.

Someone was walking on the higher level above, singing as they went.

In the clear air he could hear the light step skirt the cliff and pass inland and a fragment of song floated back to him on the breeze:

"L'amour vient, l'amour s'en va!
Tra-la-li-là—Tra-la-li-là——"

Not until long afterwards did it strike him as odd that the singer, instead of Italian, should be singing the words in French.

He folded the letter slowly and put it back in his pocket. Soon, he felt, it must be destroyed, its spirit to join those other multitudinous ones exhaled from the mauve paper with the bay-leaf seal.

"For friendship!" involuntarily he sneered.

The sun was going down, a ball of gold faintly poised on the dark line of the horizon and somewhere in the distance a boy was driving homewards his flock of goats.

"Ee—à!" the long mournful note rang out as he urged his unwieldy charges up the narrow winding track.

Something in the answering echo struck a further chord of memory in the listening man.

What was it? Ah—he remembered now—the

plovers rising from the home-meadow, when as a boy he would steal out to raid the nests.

How far ago it seemed !

And out of the mists of time his mother's face rose up, sweet and tried, with her soft, prematurely grey hair and the tender anxious eyes that would speed him forth in the morning to his daily school, and watch by the little porch, summer and winter, for his return.

He remembered that first strange call from the outside world ; the disaster in the papers that had made his mother cry out one morning as they took their breakfast together ; and afterwards the letter, grim and brief, from the old Baronet, stern as ever in his sorrow.

" Send the boy to me. He is now the heir."

Then the bustle of departure, the unwonted extravagance displayed in his new black clothes and above all the joy of that astounding present, his father's watch. He could recall his wonder at the strangeness of his mother's parting speech.

" Remember, Derrick," she had said, " whatever happens, I shall never stand in your way—I think you are old enough now to know——" she had paused for a moment as if choosing her words.

" When we were married, your grandfather disapproved—your father was the fifth son, you see, and I . . . had no money. He was in a line regiment and we were very poor," her voice trembled suddenly, " but thank God we never regretted what the world called ' our folly.' When your father was dying I wrote to Sir George, but he sent me back my letter unopened. We have never been indebted to him in any way, remember that!" She drew herself up. " Whatever happens, you owe us that memory, Derry dear,—still, I think now your

father would wish you to go."

And then suddenly she had broken down and folding the little boy in her arms—

"But it breaks my heart," she sobbed, "it breaks my heart!"

With the loving belief of childhood, that takes the place of deeper understanding, he had clung to her, comforting her.

"Don't cry, mummy dear, I shall be back in a week, and I promise——"

But she had laid her hand over his mouth, checking him.

"No, sonnie, don't promise anything—you must do as you are told, but write to me, darling, write often."

And he had gone, in a whirl of cab and train, holding his watch, the new treasure, as the carriage moved out, proudly at the open window.

"I shall wind it every night," he shouted, "and I'm coming back soon."

Then had followed swiftly events extraordinary for the little lonely lad.

The great old-fashioned landau, with its attentive servants, the deference of the guard, the open curiosity as he passed the wide lodge-gates.

Then the stately old house, rising with a sweep of flower-decked terraces, above the long stretch of lake; the high hall, hung with armour, and the wait in the shrouded, long-disused drawing-room, faintly scented with pot-pourri and the leather of ancient books, until the old aristocrat should deign to receive his heir.

Derrick the man, in far-away Capri, gave a low chuckle of amusement as he saw, through the veil of time, Derrick the boy enter into his kingdom.

For the little fellow had worked out his own childish theory in the long journey alone.

Not for worlds would he knuckle under to this grandfather he had, so it seems, but so lately acquired, who had ignored his father and slighted his darling mother. Moreover he would stay no longer than a week. The key-note to his character, his intense desire for personal freedom, had already struck. He would not be coerced and he would not be bound!

Meanwhile he drew out his watch for the footman's benefit, and gravely took the hour, as that stately functionary recounted later for the benefit of the servants' hall.

"A real chip, 'e is," he announced with joy; "to see 'im a-watching the time 'e'd been kept awaiting, you'd 'ave thought it was the old man 'issel!'"

Then he got up and followed the man, his heart beating quickly despite his childish air of assurance, into the dreaded presence.

As the library door closed behind him, Derrick saw his grandfather sitting in a deep chair in front of the fire.

He was thin and erect and although his hair was white, the bushy eyebrows were still iron-grey and gave a note of fierceness to the keen old eyes beneath.

For the rest (ignoring all pretence of mourning) he was dressed in a rough suit of Harris tweed, with muddied gaiters and boots, and the smell of the damp cloth was accentuated in the warm room and struck the little boy, always keenly sensitive to scent and sound, as peculiarly unpleasant.

He gave a little sniff and his nostrils curled as he stood there silently waiting.

At the slight sound Sir George raised his head.

"What is it?" he said, as though annoyed by an unexpected interruption.

Wilfully his grandson misunderstood him.

"A rotten smell," he answered as curtly and again he gave an audible sniff.

A faint gleam of interest came into the old man's face, as he sat there looking at the erect figure before him, with the brown eyes of his dead son so resolutely meeting his own.

"Come here," he said at last and as the lad moved forward obediently, "and sit down," he added.

Derrick took the big armchair without a word, folding his short legs nonchalantly over each other.

"What's your name?" came the harsh voice.

"Derrick Melville Kilmarny."

"How old are you?"

"Ten and a half—and a month."

"Can you read and write?"

"Yes!"—the boy's eyes flashed.

"Ride?"

There was a momentary hesitation; then—

"Yes," came the firm reply.

Not for worlds would he tell this detestable old man that his only steed so far had been, one golden summer, a donkey on the sands!

The door opened noiselessly, admitting the footman with the tea.

"Go and help yourself," said Sir George. "I don't take it."

From under his frowning brows he watched his grandson lift the massive silver tea-pot and pour out his tea with neat steady movements and help himself to some of the hot cake.

There was no haste or undue greediness. He ate with a schoolboy's hearty appetite, but his mother's gentle training betrayed itself.

Half way through an idea struck him and with

a flush of shame he scrambled down from the high-backed chair, the muffin dish held gingerly in both brown hands.

"You will have nothing to eat?" he suggested and his voice was that of an apologetic host.

The old man smiled suddenly, almost against his will. It pleased him oddly that the boy could be polite—even unto his enemy.

To his own surprise he found himself accepting the scone.

"Thank you," he said, but when the donor's back was turned, threw it vigorously into the blazing fire and his face was grimmer than ever, as Derrick, tea over, rejoined him on the hearth.

"Get your cap," he said abruptly, "we will go out."

In the same mutinous silence his grandson obeyed him.

They walked briskly down the terrace, skirted a shrubbery and behind the high trees fringing it came suddenly on to the stable buildings.

Here were fresh wonders for Derrick.

The stalls with their neat plaited borders, the roomy loose-boxes and above all the occupants, bay, chestnut, and brown, that turned soft, inquisitive noses as they heard their master's tread.

In the middle of the cobble stone courtyard a man in shirt and corduroy breeches was busy washing down the heavy landau, whistling cheerily through closed teeth.

At Sir George's voice he started and pulled his forelock.

"Has Jerry been out to-day?"

"Yes, sir; Mason rode 'im into Treyborough with the orders, sir."

"Good. Saddle him and bring him into the lower field."

He turned to his grandson.

"Thought you might like to try his paces," he said coolly.

For the hesitation in the boy's reply to his last query had not escaped him.

But he forgot that he was dealing with one of his own stubborn blood.

"Would you like a ride?" he repeated sharply.

"Rather!" said Derrick.

They walked down the green lane under the last flicker of the November sunshine and in a little while the gate was opened by the groom leading a sturdy chestnut cob.

"Get on and give him a gallop round," said Sir George to the man.

Derrick's eyes were glued on the groom, watching the way he would mount and hold the reins, and his face was anxious.

The old man smiled cynically. "He'll funk it," he thought but the possibility of refusing had never entered the boy's head, only the strong desire not to betray his ignorance.

Coming back across the short turf, it was evident that the cob pulled.

The man dismounted and shortened the stirrups with a side-long glance at the slight figure beside him.

"E's a bit fresh to-day, sir," he said, a shade apologetically, "begging yer pardon, sir, I'd ride 'im on the curb."

Derry, happy in his ignorance, smiled blandly.

"All right!" he said aloud and to himself, "left foot in stirrup—so——"

After a mighty scramble, to his secret surprise he was up.

He gathered the reins in both hands in imitation of the groom and a sudden touch of anxiety forced

itself unwillingly on Sir George as he saw the cob start off with a bound, almost unseating the little chap.

Bump, bump, bump, went Derry, his teeth set, his face very red; ah!—that was better—as the horse dropped into a canter and he sat back and took a long breath.

Round the big field they swung, the pace increasing steadily.

A wild exhilaration entered into the boy; this was better than donkeys on the sands; this was life indeed!

"Hurrah!" he yelled as they came abreast of the silent pair. "It's ripping!" he panted.

The groom's face was one broad grin of encouragement and something was stirring faintly at the fast-locked gates of the old Baronet's heart. "A chip of the old block," he chuckled, "and his father over again," but even as the words left his lips the disaster happened.

For the boy lost a stirrup and as the pace increased it swung out and back, striking the horse, already beyond control, sharply on its flank.

With a bound he was forward and away, heading straight for the low fence that fringed the field.

The trees rushed past Derrick as he gripped the reins, suddenly the ground seemed to rise rapidly under him, then down, down . . . a blinding flash of light and merciful darkness.

When he awoke it was to feel cool fingers settling the ice on his head and to hear his mother's voice.

"It's all right, Derry, lie still, dear." And as he struggled to understand—

"You've had a tumble, sonnie, and must lie quite still. Mummy's here now to look after you, so lie still, darling, to please her."

He tried to open his eyes but the light hurt him and he closed them again.

He could hear his mother's step coming and going in the room and somewhere in the high trees outside, rooks cawing faintly, but around it all was the deep stillness of the country.

"It's . . . so . . . quiet!" he said drowsily and even his own voice sounded feathery and far away as he slipped peacefully back into the happy land of sleep.

And quiet indeed it was; for the great house lay hushed and still, waiting for news of the young heir—the last of his ancient name—and downstairs, an old man, with fierce eyes gleaming under his thatch of snow-white hair, for the first time in all his stormy, stubborn old age had asked pardon of a woman!

CHAPTER II

At nineteen Derrick went up to the Varsity.

Behind him stretched long, uneventful years at school where he had gained a not over-brilliant reputation for learning but a high record at the games and the pleasant knowledge that he would be missed alike by masters and comrades when he said farewell to the old familiar buildings.

The holidays of late had held an added charm ; for his mother, won by the old man's open interest in her boy, had laid aside the last weapons of her pride, and, still refusing the shelter of the big lonely Hall, had settled down at the dower house in the Park, her few cherished household gods around her, and peace was formally proclaimed.

Here the growing lad spent long, delightful days between the rides and other forms of sport his grandfather encouraged him in so liberally and the cosy evenings with his mother in the little house in the hollow of the Park.

Now a wider view was opening to him in the form of Cambridge.

"I shall give you six hundred a year," the old Baronet had told him, "and you can have Sambo to ride—on the understanding," his voice hardened instinctively, "that you pay your way like a gentleman and pledge me your word of honour that if at the end of the first year your bills exceed your

allowance they are to be brought to me"—he banged the table with his hand—"every man jack of them!—you understand?"

And Derrick had promised gaily, with his jolly boyish laugh and his utter ignorance of money and the value thereof.

"But of course I shall make it do," he told his mother that evening at the end of their long chat, "why—it's a regular fortune, isn't it?" and the soldier's widow, with the marks of her struggle with poverty still printed on her pretty old face, sighed a little wistfully as she looked at the eager boy.

So it came about at the end of his first term he was somewhat in pocket and rejoiced accordingly.

At the end of his second he had made a multitude of friends and was, as he would have put it, "a bit to the bad."

May-week and the summer weather, plainly a matter for daily rejoicing, culminating in an unfortunate deal in sporting-prints through the kindness of a would-be connoisseur, completed the disaster and Master Kilmarney, with a fine assumption of careless indifference, had to produce a promising crop of unpaid bills for the old Baronet's inspection.

To do him justice, his grandfather received it well.

He listened with a transparent cloak of interest to the young man's halting excuses.

"I quite see it is not your fault," he broke in calmly at last, "but an error in your education. You have never been taught the value of money. Therefore I shall not blame you *this time*!"

The inference was obvious and in a pregnant silence he wrote out a cheque and handed it across.

Derrick, apparently dismissed, waited on the threshold for the sentence he knew was yet to fall.

Sir George saw it and his old eyes twinkled.

"Bye-the-bye," he said nonchalantly, "Sambo stays here next term—I've been looking into your livery-stable account and believe that this will reduce your expenditure to about the amount you find you are able to afford."

Derrick's face fell. The blow was a sharp one, for above all things he loved his horse.

But the subject was never re-opened between them.

Only as his grandfather shook hands with him at the train, he said in his casual way, "If ever you find you can afford to ride, we will see what we can do," and Derrick's quick eyes intercepted a glance that passed between the old man and his daughter-in-law.

For the common bond between them had strengthened into a very loving comprehension.

With infinite difficulty—for his nature was naturally a generous one and the man with a reputation for even moderate wealth has many calls on his purse at the Varsity—Derrick put by in his second year nearly a hundred pounds.

Armed with this and his "half-blue" for lacrosse he approached the head of his house.

"Certainly," said Sir George at the conclusion of his speech, and Sambo travelled down again to the bare Cambridge stable.

"I shall keep the money," he informed his grandson, "and consider that earlier debt annulled. There is no question of it between us now—it was a loan from one gentleman to another, while you worked out the somewhat novel problem, to you, of the ultimate value of your allowance."

He could not have hit upon a happier point of view. They shook hands solemnly with the strangely

deep sympathy of strong characters too much alike who yet agree on one fundamental point.

"I shall come down next term and see you," said Sir George, "if you can find a corner for an old man—in my time there was an excellent inn, where the coaches were wont to stop. I shall bring your mother with me."

And Derrick joyfully acquiesced, little thinking that his grandfather's visit would probably decide the trend of his whole future career.

For some time past he had drifted definitely towards an advanced political set and was gaining a certain reputation in it for the fervour of his beliefs and his natural flow of speech.

Free Trade and Tariff Reform had broken up the stagnation of the long "Cecil combine" and offered a tempting field for argument to the rival parties at the Varsity.

Discussion rose high, and the very evening Sir George arrived at Cambridge a debate was fixed at the Union with young Kilmarny to lead the attack.

And so it fell out that, as his grandfather, duly invited to attend, was leaving the doorway of the Bull, he cannoned into no less a personage than Julian Dirke, the son of his near neighbour at home, and the man of the political hour.

He was stopping but the one night at Cambridge, it seemed, before joining his fiancée, Lady Mary Anstruther, somewhere in the country.

It took but little persuasion to turn his footsteps in the same direction as Sir George's, and it is easy to imagine the enthusiastic welcome accorded the pair. Derrick, palpably nervous at first before the hero of his political creed, warmed as he got to work and fought his way to the heart of the discussion with the ease of utterance that seems to be

the Irishman's birthright, winding up in an outburst of real eloquence.

Dirke, never enthusiastic, was coldly congratulatory. Derrick trod on air.

Next day, before the busy man departed, they had a talk together.

The fact of the elder man's unfolding his scheme of work to the attentive listener shows that he thought the other worthy of the confidence.

"I wish you weren't going away," said Derrick abruptly.

Dirke laughed, but a shadow lay across his face. "I must," he said, "I'm woman-driven! You don't know what that means yet—I'm to marry Lady Mary next month, and you'd think truly it was to be a royal wedding—the fuss—the fuss!"—He threw his hands out with one of his quick gestures that his enemies dubbed as "excessive."

The next moment the cab had carried him out of sight.

"He doesn't seem very keen on matrimony," laughed the old man, "and she's the prettiest woman you ever met!—older than he is, I believe, but a real beauty for all that—and well-bred too."

"He's full of his work," said Derrick, hot in his hero's defence. "I don't blame him either—why he wants to marry, Heaven alone knows! Did you see his speech, sir, last week, at Manchester?" and so on and so on.

He was awed with the meeting for weeks to come, but gradually the memory faded, swamped in the daily stress of work and play.

Two years later, having scraped through his degree, he came down for good, and after a happy but uneventful summer at home, was curtly in-

formed by the powers-that-be that he was "to travel and enlarge his narrow mind."

"It's no good talking," said Sir George quietly, as he protested vainly against the edict. "I'll have no smug Englishman, boasting he has never crossed the Channel, stepping into my shoes! I was sent the 'grand tour' and my father before me, thank God. It mayn't be the fashion nowadays, but I believe in it, and," he smiled at the young man's sulky expression, "I'll ask you as a favour to fall in with my whim."

This was difficult to resist, and Derrick resigned himself to the inevitable, with a sigh as he thought of the new gun he had stood himself for the coming autumn.

But there was a surprise in store for him, for when the final day arrived, with the stir of departure visible about her, he beheld his mother ready to accompany him, and flushed with joy at the prospect of this glorious holiday alone with the boy she so dearly loved.

And, sound friends as they had always been, he had yet to discover in her an ideal travelling companion, as years before she had revealed herself to his father, as his regimental duties sent them from post to post.

For the eleven months that followed no happier woman probably existed than the frail, faded little creature, with her quiet knowledge of the world and her unfailing sense of humour, whose every interest centred round her tall, handsome son.

Then, in the midst of their happiness, the blow fell. For in Florence, after what seemed to him the most trivial of colds, his mother died; quietly, peacefully, her last, loving glance on her boy's face.

His grief was terrible.

After a week of indecision he decided he could not face an immediate return, with the empty dower house in the hollow of the Park.

But in Rome a fortnight later he got a telegram. "Come back at once, urgent business."

Even his young curiosity could not rise above his sorrow, but he obeyed.

At the station was the big landau and inside, to his surprise, Sir George himself.

It was typical of the two men that his mother's name was not mentioned between them in the long drive home.

As they passed the neighbouring property Sir George pointed out of the window.

"Dirke and Lady Mary are there," he remarked casually. "He has had influenza and is actually taking a holiday at last."

Derrick's eyes kindled with a faint interest. "He deserves it," he answered.

At the foot of the drive his grandfather turned and looked at him.

In a month, sorrow had achieved what nothing else could do, and his grandson was definitely a man.

"Thanks for obeying my telegram so promptly."

There was a new note in the old man's voice.

"It was not for myself," he added quietly.

A touch of compunction stung his grandson as he realised his own selfishness.

"I hope—you're all right, sir?" he said humbly.

Then Sir George administered his tonic.

"I saw Dirke on Friday. He wants a new secretary."

His grandson caught his breath at the suggestion in the voice and once again, as in his first memorable ride, the trees seemed to spin past him and the light grow dim.

Tired and weary with his long journey, he pulled himself together and returned Sir George's gaze.

"He suggested you," said the old man coolly. "You are to go to him on Monday—if you accept the post."

It speaks well for Derrick Kilmarney that his first coherent thought in the full pride of the moment was: "If only the mater knew!"

CHAPTER III

The colour had long since faded out of the sky and a cold wind was blowing off the sea as the solitary figure on the cliff side arrived at this stage in his long and unwonted study in retrospect.

He rose to his feet with a little shiver and scrambled down the narrow path which wound like a twisting snake to the far-off point above the black rocks of the Faraglioni.

Striding along, he resolutely thrust from him all further reminiscence, above all the memory of the last five years.

With the letter in his pocket that set him free where was the good of dwelling ever so lightly even on the long days of bondage and disillusion, when his boyish beliefs had toppled over one by one to end in a last crash as he realised the double-dealing underlying modern politics?

He shrugged his shoulders with a gesture unconsciously borrowed from Julian Dirke, that great apostle of personal ambition, as Derrick had learned to know him, cold, clever and intensely morbid.

How he had stumbled on his patron's secret and how the knowledge, shattering his respect, had aroused in him all the chivalry of his young, clean nature to protect the beautiful and—as he believed—unsuspecting Lady Mary from the merest hint of the truth regarding her husband.

It had been the last impetus to send him blindly down the dangerous path of pity into love.

Two years later, definitely chained to the car, he had learned with a throb of disgust that the woman he loved, wise with the wisdom of her seven seasons in town, had married Dirke with her eyes wide open.

He threw a stone viciously into the sea below as his thoughts followed him against his will.

Well—now he was free of them! Free of all women, good and bad, God be praised.

But he swung round the Tragara point moodily, for all his fine resolutions.

It was a rotten world—rotten to the core!

As usual, the very violence of his feelings overbalanced them and he began to laugh at himself as he ran up the steps of his hotel.

Dinner, that great healer, restored his usual calm, and the only shadow on the peace of the evening was the memory of the book he had been reading, left carelessly on his rocky ledge.

It was the first thought that came to him as the sunshine woke him early the following day.

His watch, to his surprise, marked barely six o'clock. Another hour to wait before the sturdy country-girl would appear with the tub of fresh seawater that did duty for his bath.

With a sudden energy he slipped into his clothes and started off, through the crisp clear air, to recover his missing property.

The haze of approaching heat hung over the deep blue sea. A light rain had fallen in the night and glistened where it lay in the hairy cups of the cactus-leaves and the grass shewed fresh and grateful in its release from its heavy pall of dust.

As he reached the winding path round the cliff

and left the last house behind him, he paused for a moment to drink in the full glory of the morning, filling his strong young lungs with a deep breath of the salted air.

And then he realised that he was not alone. For, far below him, on a little beach of pebbles, shielded from the breeze by the high black rocks, there stood the solitary figure of a woman.

Her head was bared to the sunshine that played upon the masses of her red-gold hair, and even as Derrick stood there, in surprise at the sudden apparition, she gave a quick glance of suspicion around her, as if making sure of perfect solitude, but forgetting the possibility of intruders, at that hour, on the cliff above.

Apparently satisfied with her scrutiny, she proceeded to roll up her sleeves, far above the elbow, revealing round white arms, tapering delicately towards the little brown hands. Next she turned back the collar of her soft shirt, baring her throat with a gesture of happy freedom, as she seated herself on a smooth boulder by the edge of the sea.

For one brief moment she played with her shoe-strings as the clear water attracted her attention. Then, abandoning the impulse she stretched out her lightly-shod feet before her into the full warmth of the sunshine, drawing her skirts up daintily for the rays to fall on her trim ankles in their thin lace stockings.

Derrick could have laughed aloud at the quaintness of the picture, but for the guilty consciousness of spying upon her; and suddenly the girl threw out her bare arms, her face turned towards the glowing east, in unconscious imitation of the sun-worshippers of old whose traces still remain on this very island of Capri in the Cave of Mithras.

"Oh you dear, dear sunshine," he heard her say, "*how* I love you!"

The words floated up faintly to him where he stood and he carried back to the hotel his recovered book, soaked with its all-night vigil in the rain, and a vision of the slim figure, glorying in the sunshine and crowned by the splendour of her chestnut hair.

It was six hours later and the sun high in the cloudless heavens when he threw himself down with a sigh of relief at the further end of the island, under the welcome shadow of a wali.

His face was burnt to the colour of the proverbial berry and his dark eyes and slim, athletic build he could easily have passed for an Italian of the hills, that wiry, vigorous but infinitely supple race of men.

As he threw his cap off, however, the resemblance ceased. For the line of the cloth shewed the boundary-mark of his fair, well-shaped forehead and his hair, though dark with the wave he tried so strenuously each morning to efface, had not the crispness of the Southerner's.

The single white lock, only trace of his boyhood's accident that remained, marked him out for ever from among the general crowd, and he ran his hand carefully over the smooth parting, which, brush as he might, struggled to involve itself in curls at the slightest hint of damp.

And he was exceedingly hot.

For as he told himself with a chuckle, it had been a near shave!

He had gone down interminable rock-hewn steps to the level of the shore to visit a natural arch, vaunted by the local guide-book, jutting out from the rocks at the south-east promontory; where the laughing waves broke ceaselessly and in days of

storm, boiled through the narrow opening into the basin of the cave like a veritable witches' cauldron.

Far away, framed in the oval of the arch, one caught a glimmer of the distant shore and in the near distance, dotted like drops of ink on the blue surface of the Mediterranean, rose into line the sister islands of the Siren.

As he sat there watching the play of light and shade on the waters a fancy came to him and drawing out a pencil he dotted it down on a stray sheet of paper.

For half an hour he worked at his verses and then with a quick glance around, repeated them aloud to hear the swing of the metre :

"There is an island, loved by gods of old,
'Midst seas so blue, they mock the azure sky,
Save here and there where purple shadows lie
Or emerald ripples round the great rocks fold."

He corrected a word and went on steadily,

"And here, on summer evenings, man can still
Catch the faint luring notes of that fair Siren's song
Who, when the high Gods left, from the Olympian throng,
Look'd back, 'gainst Jove's decree to Cæsar's hill."

He glanced up for a moment thoughtfully, to where on the heights above him still shewed the ruins of a castle of Tiberius.

"Then powerless, in the new terror of farewell,
Her soulless, witching voice, in one last song
Poured forth its swan-notes over fair Capri,
But Echo, lurking in a rocky dell
Stole the great chords of pagan melody
That still the sons of men might love and long."

He gave a little sigh. It was years since he had succumbed to his love of poetry, and he felt almost ashamed of his sudden outburst of sentiment.

He headed it carefully however, "The Stolen Secret," and was just folding it away when a high American voice broke upon his ear.

"Waal! Of all the cunning little arches!"—

He was on his feet in a moment, disgust visible on his handsome face, as he recognised from afar an American party, who to the detriment of his peace of mind had lately arrived at the hotel.

Vainly he looked for a channel of escape but the distant steps were cut off from him by a flutter of petticoats and he turned and fled along the shore in the opposite direction.

"My! if there isn't the young Englishman from our 'ôtel," the twang followed him remorselessly. "Say, mamma, but isn't he just elegant in that grey suiting?"

He looked up desperately at the steep cliffs above. There was no other way, he would have to climb: He would sooner drown, he told himself angrily, than join the party on their homeward march.

Up he went, now slipping on the sheer rock, now knee-deep in sweet-scented myrtle, testing the strength of the tangled wild vines as he swung himself up hand over hand.

The sun poured down upon him, blistering his neck between his collar and his cap, and the very rocks, as he grasped them in his climb, struck hot upon his hands.

But all things mercifully have an end, and with a sigh of relief he found himself at last on the scorched slope of the hillside.

Now, as he leaned back against the shady wall, dissecting it, and stretched his long legs comfortably on the grass, he smiled broadly at the dexterity of his escape.

But even as he congratulated himself on his hardly acquired seclusion in the act of lighting his pipe, a voice fell on his ear, so near that he jumped involuntarily, his match flickering out between his fingers.

"It is all very well for you, cane mio, to lie down and comfortably pant, but if we are going to reach home at all, over the wall we shall have to go!"

An English voice, clear and gay, with a something vaguely familiar in its tones; and Derrick too lazy to move, smiled against his will, as the speaker continued:

"I admit it's sad! We've a nice field all to ourselves, with a stream where orchids grow, plenty of amaranths nodding their heads and a view of perpetual blueness! But there—Oh gingerbread monstrosity—you have to contend with the weakness of human nature!—No, don't beg, you ridiculous animal, it's philosophy I'm offering you, not buns!—philosophy, which next to good advice is the cheapest form of charity from the well-to-do to the afflicted. Come down at once, you'll have a fit in this sunshine! Well—to proceed. 'Wherever a boundary is marked by a wall, with it there comes the strong desire to look over into the forbidden.' The wisdom of *Candida*. Book II."

The voice broke off into a little ripple of laughter.

"Well caught, Oh Fat One, and let us hope that flies, carefully digested, will reduce your distressing figure! Come here—Heavens! it's like lifting a sheep—there, lie still."

Derrick could hear distinctly, through the loosely-piled stones, the little pats with which she caressed the dog.

"You *are* rather a dear," the voice continued, "to follow me about like this. I wonder where you come from and what your name is and if you are down on the list of Cook's properly accredited guides! You might be, truly—you're so solemn and so well-fed, with one eye always on my pocket. Well—it's my last biscuit—catch! Clumsy! Now

over the wall you *shall* go, willy-nilly!"

There came a scrabbling sound at Derrick's back and a loose stone from the top rolled into his lap.

He sprang to his feet with an exclamation, just in time as he turned to realise the fat yellow body of a dog, feet wildly clawing the empty air, upheld by two small brown hands, firmly clasped about its middle, above the level of the wall.

Instinctively he reached up and grasped the animal by the scruff of its neck and well for him that he did so, for at the sound of his voice, the hands relaxed suddenly.

"It's all right, I've got him!" he cried. The next moment the girl's head came into view, cheeks flushed with exertion, and her eyes, blue as forget-me-nots, widely astonished under a mass of tumbled chestnut curls.

It was the little sun-worshipper!

She gave one swift look at the man as he lowered the struggling animal to the ground and stifled a strong desire to laugh.

"Thank you so much," she said demurely as with a dexterous twist she seated herself on the topmost stones. "I'd no idea how heavy he was!"

Derrick under the scrutiny of the amused blue eyes rushed blindly on his fate.

"And what about yourself?" he suggested.

Then, as he saw his mistake:

"I mean, of course, about getting over. Can't I—give you a hand? These loose stones are rather dangerous."

"Oh! no, thank you," said the lady quickly, "it's quite easy, really—if—if you would only——"

But Derrick, trained by women, as promptly understood and turning round with a palpably forced interest in the view:

"What a gorgeous colour the sea is to-day," he suggested cheerfully to the world at large.

There came a soft rustle behind him and the fall of a loosened stone and the next minute the girl was at his side, breathless and triumphant.

"Talking of dogs," she said with a laugh, "where is my gingerbread friend?"

They gazed up and down the bare hillside, but the yellow dog had disappeared.

She whistled vainly once or twice then took a step forward into the glaring sunshine.

"Now you are over, why not sit down in the shade and wait for him? This is really the nicest side of the wall and the only spot sheltered from the sun between here and the town." Derrick felt quite proud of his sudden diplomacy.

"The dog's sure to return."

She hesitated for a moment, then as her eyes took in the glaring expanse ahead, accepted the seat he offered her on a smooth boulder well under the grateful shadow.

"It doesn't really matter about him," she leaned back comfortably as she spoke, "it's not my dog at all, only a stray acquaintance."

"And even stray acquaintances are better in the shade on a day like this!"

Their eyes met and they both laughed.

"As long as it is not the acquaintances who are shady," she amended, with a quick, mischievous glance at the good-looking man beside her.

"I can answer for myself," he said daringly.

A dimple came into her fair sunburnt cheek.

"How delightful! I wish I could, but I never know what I am going to do next—Candida is my name and Candida is my nature, you see!"

"It sounds like a game one used to play as a

child." He fell into her mood easily, as he lolled up against the wall, his artistic eye pleased by the vivid note of colour she struck against the dark background of shady stone with her crumpled white frock throwing into relief the pink of her cheeks, her shining eyes and the glory of those "sun-kist curls."

Her arms, bare to the elbow, were round and freckled and he noticed that her hands were innocent of rings.

She looked so young, so fresh, with her laughing red lips and obvious delight in the unconventionality of the proceeding, what could he do but forget his recent ban against her sex and follow blindly where she should choose to lead?

"I know the game you mean," she nodded her head wisely, dotting off the points as she proceeded on her fingers.

"I love my love with a C and her name is Candida. She lives at Capri, where the capers come from—do they, by the bye?—I caught her in a cave——" she paused.

"Teaching a cray-fish cakewalks;"—he filled the gap and she went on with a little gurgle of laughter.

"I fed her on capsicums and cherry-brandy——"

"Not this weather, I trust!"

"Now you've spoilt it," she cried, "I can't think of any more—so you must start. Surely it's a pleasant variation on the ordinary introduction—let's patent it and take it back to London."

He made a mental note of her city and hastened to obey.

"I love my love with a D. His name is Derrick. I met him on the deep seas, dancing a 'deux-temps.' I fed him——" he paused for breath and she chimed in irrepressibly.

"On dandelion-tea and—and devilled oysters! No," as he cried out "Cheating!" "it does beautifully, if you only say the words quickly."

"And devil d'oysters," he laughed boyishly and proceeded—"I gave him a dappled dog——"

But at the word, her mood suddenly changed. To his surprise she rose to her feet.

"How perfectly absurd!" she said slowly. "I really must be going now. Thank you so much for helping the dog over; and, talking of angels, here he is."

Derrick looked, as he felt, a shade uncomfortable. After all it was, as she had suddenly realised, a perfectly absurd situation, but the blame was not his alone.

He stooped down and patted the dog in silence.

To complete his mortification, the dog growled.

He drew himself up very straight, his cap already in his hand, but when he raised his eyes, it was to find his pretty visitor swaying in a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"I'm so sorry," she gasped, "but I'm sure he doesn't bite! It's very ungrateful though, and you must forgive him, as he's intensely jealous of other 'stray acquaintances,' and you see," she shook back a loose curl that had fallen over her dancing eyes, "like the housemaids we're 'walking out' together!" She turned round as she spoke and waved her hand.

"Good-bye again, and very many thanks," and she proceeded along the narrow path that, coasting the hill, led back, round the far distant point into the town of Capri.

The sun shone dazzlingly down on the whiteness of her frock and played with gleams of gold in her radiant hair.

A few paces ahead, dignified and stout, the yellow dog rolled heavily forwards on his short, widely-parted legs.

As she got to the first turning above the black rocks of the Faraglioni, she broke into song and the clear notes floated back to the young man where he stood.

"L'amour vient, l'amour s'en va! Tra-la-li-là, Tra-la-li-là."

"Well—I'm—blest!" said Derrick Kilmarney.

CHAPTER IV

Candida Clifton sat at her bedroom window in the little inn on the Punto Tragara, looking out to sea.

The room was scrupulously clean but by no stretch of the imagination could it be called "furnished."

A mat did duty for carpet, the stone mantel-shelf for dressing-table, and the only article with any attempt at decoration was a large wooden crucifix decked with a sprig of holy palm that was nailed above the narrow bedstead.

"And that is no good to me!" said Candida honestly. "What a comfort it must be to be really religious on a wet day like this—I should lay up a store of prayers on my rosary against the next spell of sunshine."

For the rain had been pouring down steadily since early dawn and Candida, idle and restless, was in one of those empty moods peculiarly the devil's own.

She crossed the room for the hundredth time and peeped down the uneven stairs towards the kitchen from which rose a strong smell of soup on the heavy moist air.

Not a single voice in the bar-room below! The place was like a tomb.

"It's all very well to be free and to glory in it," said Candida aloud, "but this is distinctly dull!"

The sound of her own voice accentuated the feeling of solitude and with a gesture of impatience she threw open the French windows and leaned out over the narrow balcony, gazing far away to the leaden sea below.

There came a quick pattering on the steps that led down towards the shore, and the yellow dog, sleek and shining in the rain like a tight oil-skin drum, answered her welcoming call with a hollow bark.

Immediately behind him followed the Englishman and he too looked up quickly at the slight figure on the balcony.

She waved her hand gaily in answer to the sudden pleasure in his face.

"Good-day! you've made friends, you two, I see: I'm so glad. Isn't it detestable weather?"

"A bit damp!" said Derrick laughing as a perfect shower of rain sprinkled off his raised cap. "But I've only just met our gingerbread friend. He was waiting for you outside, in the little piazza, patiently."

She shook her head at him. "I never go out in the rain if I can help it; I'm like the cats, I hate getting my paws wet."

He looked up with interest at the little house.

"Is it comfortable up there?"

She laughed down at him gaily, the rain sparkling on her hair.

"A perfect palace of luxury. All the chairs have three legs and the carpet is seven inches by nine, with a hole in the middle. Still, I like it in good weather, because of the gorgeous view, but on a day like this it is rather depressing."

"Are you all alone? It must be dull!"

His voice was compassionate and indeed she looked a little woebegone as she leaned out between the bare, curtainless windows.

"To be perfectly candid," came the reply, "I am absolutely alone and distinctly dull—there you have it in a nutshell."

She laughed provokingly as she saw his indecision.

"You're giving my yellow dog a chill: go on, both of you, and get your healthy exercise. I am going to try what one frantic unexpected prayer for fine weather will do in the proper quarter, so au revoir."

And she shut the French window resolutely and went indoors.

But a pebble came up rattling against the glass.

"I say——"

After a minute's pause she relented suddenly and came out on the balcony.

"Well?"

"Don't go in for a second—I've got an idea."

"Do be quick then," she urged, "it's so horribly damp."

"Well, do you know the Hei-dei-gei-gei? it's a sort of café in the town where the students go and drink beer in the evenings."

She shook her head.

"They're going to dance the Tarantella there to-night; you ought to see it, really. Will you come?"

"In the rain?" She hesitated for a moment looking down at Derrick's open, handsome face.

"It isn't far," he urged; "put on galoshes and a good cloak. I'll come and fetch you about half-past eight. They've got a new dancer, I'm told, far better than Carmina, the old one, and it really is

very pretty to watch. Anyhow I'll turn up on the chance of your going; you will find me, like the yellow dog, in the piazza."

And without waiting for her reply he was off, following the impatient animal down the winding path to the shore.

Candida stood for a moment watching him, her fingers drumming idly against the glass.

"I wonder," she said aloud—"it would be rather fun—but I don't think I will."

Half an hour later she was hunting for her galoshes, singing as she went.

The spell of loneliness was broken and even the monotony of the weather.

For as the twilight faded it carried the rain with it over the far line of the darkened sea, and, one by one the stars threw back their shutters and peered forth, with bright inquisitive eyes, into the doings of the night.

Candida sat in the smoke-wreathed café at one of the little round tables in the corner, deeply interested in the scene.

Beside her, Derrick, drinking his coffee slowly, watched the play of expression on her pretty face as the blue eyes wandered from table to table, summing up the medley assortment of humanity.

"What are the men in uniform? Not soldiers, surely?"

"They come from the telegraph station up on the hill, but the man at the third table, with the little dark beard, is Marini, the captain of the Naples boat. He's got a fine voice and the other evening Donna Lucia, the proprietor's wife, induced him to sing to us."

But here the dancers appeared, gay in their brightly-coloured dress and fell into pose with a pre-

liminary rattle of castanets and Candida had eyes for no one else.

As the bare feet quickened on the sanded floor, a little flush of colour stole into her cheeks and her lips parted over her small white teeth.

She leaned forward, her head dancing to the steady beat of the clapping hands.

On they whirled, faster and faster, the woman's supple figure swaying, entreating, protesting, as the man's movements quickened with slowly-increasing importunity.

Out flew the scarf as she turned and poised on tip-toe feet and deftly it wound itself round the man's outstretched, pursuing grasp; on and on with the silken link between them, until, with a final whirl of defiance, in a clatter of castanets the dance ceased suddenly, and the woman lay, flung back over the supporting arm, with panting breast, and glowing eyes upturned towards the swarthy, triumphant face above her, in the final radiant pose of conquest and submission.

A little cry broke from the unconscious Candida. "Oh! how nice." She clapped her hands vigorously in the applause that followed and the new dancer's eyes rested for a moment on her fair, excited face.

She moved up slowly towards the unmistakably Saxon pair.

"The Signorina is pleased with the dance?"

Derrick nodded as he dropped a franc into the outstretched tambourine.

"The Signorina should learn," the woman continued. "She would dance it well, she is of the height, I know, for I have taught many."

Derrick translated the speech as he saw the inquiring expression on Candida's face.

"I should love to," she said. "Ask her how? I

mean where she teaches it, and if she could come to the inn. What fun it would be!"

"I understan'," said Giannina, "although I spik not well. The English lady must come to me, but he, the Signore, he must learn too. Madonna! it would make a fine pair—" she gave them a quick comprehensive glance and continued, dropping into her native tongue,

"My house it is midway, on the road to Timberio, not the first house, Signore, that is Carmina's, make no mistake. Mine is the second, up the hill, and I have a fine room where I teach the dance, and I teach it well," she nodded her dark head wisely, "the Signore will see!"

"Oh! I don't think *I* could learn," laughed the man but Giannina threw out her hands dramatically.

"For one, then, it is impossible! *Che peccato!*"

She gave him a bold glance out of her bright black eyes.

"*E la bella Signorina*, see how disappointed he makes her!"

But Candida said nothing.

"After all," Derrick amended slowly, "it would be something to do—" he hesitated, his eyes on his companion's averted face.

She turned her head and looked at him inquiringly, even a little doubtfully. Then suddenly her love of mischief prevailed.

"Teaching a crayfish cake-walks," she quoted and they both laughed.

But Giannina caught the word.

"Ze cake-walk? Ah—no!" she shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "It is of an ugliness, ma! The Tarantella now, it is beauty and skill—*è l'amore*—"

She struck her hands together and fell into the

opening attitude, her white teeth flashing in a smile as she glanced back over her raised shoulder invitingly at the young people.

"Let's do it!" cried Derrick impulsively, won by the spirit of the hour. "I shall make an awful mess of my part, I expect, but anyhow it will be fun to try. Tell me, honestly, would you like to?"

"Yes," said Candida, "of course."

"For to-morrow then, the first lesson, the Signore will not forget, it is the *second* house, the house of Giannina, a riverderci, Signorina," and with a twirl of her full petticoats she was gone, her tambourine jingling as she swept from table to table, laughing, cajoling, and gathered in the slender offerings.

"I'm so glad," said Candida simply, "I was afraid I should have to fall back on the yellow dog for a partner."

"I expect he would make a better one," laughed Derrick, "just a shade heavy in 'taking the floor' perhaps, but think of the dignity with which he would pose! Are you getting tired of this? The smoke is rather thick——"

"I think a little fresh air would be nice, and I ought to be getting back."

She took a deep breath as they came out into the coolness of the evening.

"Come and say good-night to old Vesuvius first," he suggested and they turned up the narrow street and crossing the main piazza came out on the high terrace overhanging the Bay of Naples.

Far away rose the hazy outlines of the big mountain, grey and sombre with its faintly glowing crest, now veiled from their eyes by smoke-wreathed clouds, now red with a menace of hidden power.

A strange bond seemed to knit the two together

as they stood there silently watching it.

"It makes one feel so small," said Candida, "such a speck of creation. I don't think I like it!" She gave a little shiver.

"Oh!" She clutched her companion's arm in a sudden uncontrollable fear as a twisting streak of fire shewed in the crater's side and vanished as quickly as it came, like a fiery serpent out of the dark.

Involuntarily Derrick laid his hand over the little hot one grasping his sleeve.

"It's all right," he said soothingly, "that must be the new seam on the eastern slope; I've heard of it but never seen it before. You'll soon get accustomed to Vesuvio. He's quite an old friend of mine, and I assure you he's very harmless."

She laughed nervously, withdrawing her hand from his.

"It takes one's breath away, like a fiery Jack-in-the-box; I'm sure I shall never get on really friendly terms with him. Good-night, Vesuvio," she nodded her head solemnly. "And now I must go home, it's quite late for Capri and I'm not accustomed to such tremendous dissipation!"

That night, he dreamed that she was dancing the Tarantella up the slope of the dark mountain itself. He could see her turn and beckon with the fluttering scarf she held, up, up, up, till her rounded form stood outlined against the red fire of the summit, as she swirled on, arms uplifted above her nodding chestnut curls, and her blue eyes flashing back at him, right into the very heart of the burning crater.

"Free!" she cried, "you are free!" and vanished into the flames.

He woke to find his shutters open and the sun-

light pouring down on his closed eyelids with dazzling force, but long afterwards the dream returned and with a throb of pain he realised it was a vision.

For, during the days that followed, as they practised the Tarantella together on the sanded floor of Giannina's kitchen, she danced her way lightly, laughingly, through all his vaunted defences, right into the very innermost chambers of his heart!

CHAPTER V

"I am so accustomed to loneliness," said Candida thoughtfully.

She stooped forward and poked up the wick of the lamp with a little stick, as the kettle sent forth a preliminary song of joy from the shelter of the low, dry hedge.

Derrick, his back against an olive-tree, was cutting the long roll with a great show of usefulness.

"I never had sisters or brothers, you see, or even friends like most children."

"Do you remember India at all?" he asked as he buttered the slice and placed it carefully in the shade.

"Oh no!" she answered, "My mother died when I was only two and I was packed off home at once to the little Scotch village where my father's sister, Aunt Hester, lived. She was the minister's wife, a tall, bleak Scotchwoman with no children of her own, and she treated me from the beginning as 'a burden sent by the Lord.' I think it was the life there that gave me such a horror of religion, the cold despotic cruelty of its rule and the absolute power of its ministers, not only over the souls but over the very bodies of the congregation!"

She shuddered. "Don't let's talk of it—not out here in the blessed sunshine."

"Ah! tell me a little more," he begged; "what a dear quaint little child you must have been!"

She smiled with an attempt at her usual gaiety. "I will tell you the great tragedy of my early life," she announced, "the history of my only doll. It is short but full of dramatic possibilities. The doll—my first-born and the darling of my soul—was made of rag—featureless, flabby, but deeply beloved. I played with it in an evil moment on the Sabbath day.

"They came upon us unawares as she sat in a pulpit made of pebbles and delivered a strong discourse on the sins of humanity!—and at 'seventhly, dearly-beloved brethren,' a cruel hand wrested her away and she was burnt before my very eyes in the parlour fire-place.

"Over her cremated remains I took my first vow to renounce the faith of my forefathers——"

She broke off suddenly.

"The kettle," she cried, "it's boiling over!"

He sprang forward to seize it off the lamp whilst she busied herself with the cups and saucers.

It was an ideal day for a picnic.

The hot sun was slowly sinking over the edge of Monte Solaro, where they had climbed from Anacapri before preparing tea.

They sat on the shady slope of an orchard, broken by cherry-trees and the softer green of the stunted olives and sprinkled with anemones and waving clusters of amaranth, with the fresh air about them and sympathy in their hearts.

What could be more perfect? At least, so thought the girl, as yet hardly awake to the hint of danger in the air.

To Derrick Kilmarny, however, a drop of poison

lay in the beauty of the cup.

That he had fallen in love with all the force of his manhood, he realised but too well, with the honesty with which he faced most questions of importance.

The present was glorious indeed, but then how long would it last?

And afterwards?

For marriage, he told himself, was out of the question.

And what else remained?

One look at the girl's fair, unsuspecting face shewed the simplicity and purity of thought of the mind within.

He was no Don Juan to plot against a lonely woman's virtue; when the storm broke it would have to be farewell.

And yet the very thought roused such a sense of desolation that his mind involuntarily swung back to the hackneyed legal remedy.

Marriage!

It was a monopoly, still more unbearable through carrying the sanction of the law. It was to set a spy willingly on all one's most intimate intentions, to sweep away the glamour of illusion and outline life with hard lead-pencil strokes.

He remembered Lewis Stevenson. "To marry is to domesticate the recording angel;" and his face darkened as he sat there, watching her daintily serve the tea, in that solitude à deux that suggested the daily ménage.

His mind ran on in revolt. He would not be bound again. A sudden memory of Mary Dirke he thrust away, conscious of a vague sense of profanation to the bright-haired girl before him. He was no longer a boy to be led, and he dared not run

the risk. It was the road to misery, to broken promises and lowered self respect.

He would be free!

He owed it to the exuberant vitality of his strong body and brain as he sat there in all the power of his twenty-nine healthy years.

What!—to escape the fetters that so lately had eaten into his flesh merely to sink into deeper bondage with chains that Death alone could sever? The thought was absurd and yet——

He loved her!

From the crown of her chestnut head to the slender, dancing feet, her little freckled hands and the curve of her cheek as she turned her face away, all he loved, all he longed for, to hold as his own.

He got up restlessly and stood above her, his brows frowning with thought, as she packed away the plates with the neat precision he found so utterly dainty, apparently ignorant of his moody silence.

The hasp of the basket jammed and he stooped down over her and adjusted it with a turn of his strong fingers, and the mischievous breeze of evening blew a curl across his lips—a silken chestnut curl.

He drew back quickly, the pulses throbbing in his throat. He loved her so, ah! the pity of it!

She broke the silence suddenly, her thoughts wandering back to the talk between them earlier in the day.

"I can't get over the queer coincidence of our fathers being in the same regiment," she said; "it seemed, somehow, as if they had brought us together."

She paused for a moment and he set his teeth.

Yes, it would mean farewell—ah, it was hard!

"I wish," she continued gently, "I could remember my father mentioning yours, but, in honesty I can't. Then you see, I saw very little of him until I was nineteen and he had retired on his pension."

He cleared his throat. "Where did you live?" he asked, but it seemed an effort to pitch his voice.

She stood up, shaking the crumbs from off her frock. "In Devonshire," she answered him, "at a little sea-side place, very quiet and dull, but oh! so nice after the gloomy north. It was there I became a sun-worshipper!" She laughed up at him where he stood, remembering his confession of the early morning adventure; "and then," her voice fell reverently, "my father died just as we were beginning to understand each other, and I was alone again."

"And then?"

A little flush came into her face and she stooped down to gather a flower.

"I'm tired of talking about myself," she pleaded, "and tired too of sitting in the ditch. Let's move about and spy out the nakedness of the land."

She drew the long lavender scarf she wore more tightly round her throat. "It's really getting chilly," she said and she gave a sudden shiver.

Something in her manner puzzled the man beside her.

"Would you like a walk?" he suggested. "We could hide the basket somewhere and fetch it on our way home."

She looked up at the steep side of the hill in indecision and suddenly her face cleared.

"Listen," she said, "I've got an idea. You see that nice flat piece of grass out in the sunshine? We'll practise our Tarantella. Oh! if only I had my castanets! But this will do for the scarf."

She unwound it from her neck, deep in her project, as he half-deprecatingly assented.

"Come along," she cried, "you ought to get that second movement a lot smoother and then it would all go like a house on fire. Now then, you stand there, so——"

She struck an attitude, her arms above her head, one foot tapping the grass, her face alight with determination.

On they went soberly, stopping at times to practise their steps or control the wind-blown scarf, and at last the excitement gained upon them and they laughed aloud as their feet grew faster in the mad whirl of the dance.

Round she spun, her bright hair tossing in the sunshine, her blue eyes shining and his breath came faster and faster as he started in pursuit and at last with a final pirouette she lay, posed against his supporting arm, panting, triumphant, lost in the fine frenzy of the moment.

His head spun round and almost unconsciously he strained her to him, then with the thrill of her nearness a cry broke from his lips and he stooped and kissed her warm white throat, raining kisses upon her hair, her eyes, her mouth.

For a moment in the suddenness of the attack, she lay there helpless; then with all her force she thrust him from her and they stood apart, breathless, looking into each other's eyes.

"Candida—" He hardly breathed her name but the word roused her from her amazement and with a cry she turned away, covering her flushed face with her hands.

"Oh! how could you, how could you!"

Her voice broke and with the panic born of the joy that, despite all, welled up in her loving heart she turned and started off down the rocky path, stumbling blindly forward over the uneven ground.

"Candida, my darling, listen to me."

Her feet broke into a run, but in a few strides he was beside her, turning her with gentle force so that he could see her face.

And at the sight of it, white and frightened as it was, his passion broke out again.

"God! how I love you!" he cried.

But she shrank away.

"Hush, you mustn't, you *mustn't*! Oh! I had hoped—" her voice was cut by a sob. "It's all my fault and now—I *must* tell you——"

He saw her set her teeth, and the words came incoherently through them,

"So hard—" she wailed, "forgive me—Derrick—" Then with a gasp,

"I'm married."

In the first shock of his amazement his arms fell to his side and with a quick movement, full of agonised protest at the words she divined on his lips, she turned and fled wildly, as fast as her feet could carry her, away, down the smiling orchard slope.

Married!

After the first stunning blow he could have laughed aloud from sheer force of relief. Why, that set him free!

Free of the phantom that had dogged his steps whispering hourly her innocence and his heavy responsibility.

A married woman. He drew a deep full breath as he stood there, thinking, his eyes unseeing, lost on the mass of blossom below.

With that virginal face and her childish, mocking eyes! And then the little brown fingers innocent of rings. It was a mystery, a most blessed, wondrous mystery.

A sudden spasm of anger shook him. Where was the husband then, to let her wander about in this mad way alone?

He remembered a speech of hers but a day or two ago, when he had inadvertently gloried in the freedom of his life.

"And I too," she had cried, in her quaint half-serious way, "I am a 'ticket-of-leave man', I would have you know, just like the yellow dog I expect, let out, on parole, from prison."

Then she had added with a sigh,

"But one day, soon, I shall have to return."

So that was it then, and the husband the jailor, confound him!

For a sharp twinge of jealousy struck through him at the thought. She had seemed so inaccessible, so far away on her snowy peak of purity and all the time—he gave a little laugh—she was just an everyday, pretty little married woman, playing a trick on them both, the husband and would-be-lover.

And at this point he started off to track her flying footsteps, but when he got to the level of the road, hot and breathless outside the little Piazza, he saw a carriage take the second curve, in a cloud of dust, below him.

In the reaction from the sudden crash of all his preconceived ideas, he sat down at the cafe and lighted a cigarette.

"After all," he said, "she deserves to be punished a little. I'll just leave her alone."

CHAPTER VI

That night he dreamed of her again, not as a poet this time; his dream was a man's dream—of love satisfied.

And the morning brought a letter in a round, childish hand with odd touches of character in the firm downward strokes.

She began without preface, boldly.

"This is not an apology—or form of excuse, which I loathe, but merely to explain conduct which I know you are condemning. It is not so much for your sake as in defence of my own pride that I write—I owe it to myself that you should not go away misjudging me."

He could have laughed aloud at the typical outburst, knowing her wilful spirit.

"I will explain as briefly as I can," the letter continued. "When my father died, he left as my trustee and guardian a Mr. Geoffrey Clifton, a friend of many years standing and our near neighbour in Devonshire. He was twenty years my senior and an exceedingly clever man. During the late reign he had been Queen's Messenger, but retiring early had settled down to his one hobby in the country—that of translating the hitherto little known literature of Spain. But for my Aunt Hester, I had no

relations living and I dreaded the thought of returning to the narrow Scotch life.

"Meanwhile I felt I interfered with the steady course of my guardian's studious existence and he, I suppose, chafed under the unconventionality of the situation. The result was, one day he asked me to marry him, pointing out how much it would simplify matters and arguing that as my father's dearest friend, he felt it would be with the consent of the dead.

"Love did not seem to enter into it and out of sheer lonely desperation, I consented.

"For three years we lived in the little village, with a monotony which you may imagine.

"It was practically exchanging one parent for another and even the house stood at the end of the same long lane.

"But last spring my husband suddenly made up his mind to go to London.

"He had a great work in hand and needed the facility for research into rare Spanish M.S. that London alone afforded.

"We took a house in Regent's Park and my joy knew no bounds. The life, the lighted streets, everything interested me at first. But later on I learned that in a big city one can be far lonelier than in the quiet country where the very school-children knew one by name.

"My husband grew more and more absorbed in his translations. We had no friends except a few scholars with whom his work brought him in touch. I missed my garden and above all the sea. Then the grey winter came down upon us with its choking fogs and I fell ill with a severe attack of congestion of the lungs.

"The doctor ordered me South and Geoffrey was

torn asunder between his duty to me and his work. Eventually we compromised and I came with friends as far as Naples, bringing an old and trusted servant and settled in an English pension whilst they proceeded via Brindisi to India.

"One day, two ladies I met there suggested our running over to Capri for the week-end.

"I came, and lost my heart to the fascinating little island and revelled in the first delight of absolute freedom from authority. Susan I had thankfully left behind in Naples. More guardian than servant, she had resolutely set her face against anything 'un-English' and was a perpetual wet-blanket on my joy in foreign scenes. After the two old ladies left me for Amalfi, I lingered on, moving from the hotel to my little inn on the Punto Tragara and allowing Susan in Naples to conclude I was still with English friends.

"Here by the merest accident began the mistake of my name.

"I had hurt my hand climbing over the rocks and as the fingers were swelling I removed my rings, as they seemed to make it more painful.

"That was the day before I changed my quarters, and only later did I realise that owing to this and my absurdly youthful appearance the good people here took me for an independent 'English miss.'

"Once accented as such, with my poor knowledge of the language, I shirked explanation and also must confess that the feeling of being so utterly my own mistress in a delicious reincarnation of childhood's days captured my imagination.

"When first I met you, under the unconventional circumstances you will remember"—the reader smiled involuntarily as his mind reverted to the yellow dog, but the gulf fixed between this frigid

letter and her old inconsequence hurt a little too and he went on quickly—"it seemed unnecessary to explain that I was married and day by day since I have evaded the question, not through any motive of cowardice, but because it seemed to jar on the simplicity of our friendship.

"Until yesterday I saw no reason for revealing the secret which now I so bitterly regret.

"For any pain I may have caused you I ask to be forgiven and I do beg of you to believe me when I say I had no intention of willingly deceiving you."

The long letter wound up stiffly with a sudden drawing in of sentimental horns.

"Yours sincerely,

"CANDIDA CLIFTON."

But Derrick's face was grave. He could not avoid being touched by the sincerity of the confession and he was forced to admit that he had deeply misjudged her.

Then the extraordinary story of her married life appealed to his imagination.

"It was like exchanging one parent for another."

He read the phrase again with a growing curiosity and pictured to himself the emptiness of her days.

No wonder she had rejoiced in the opening of the prison-gates; in the sunshine and glamour of the world beyond, this beautiful young creature, instinct with life, straining towards the wonder of far horizons after the stifling atmosphere of the dull student existence!

Poor child! A spasm of pity blotted out his last thought of blame and with it there came the desire to seek the untrodden ways that her blue eyes swept the hills to find, by her side, hand-in-hand with the little sun-worshipper.

As he strode along in the direction of the inn, picture after picture unfolded itself before him. For the possibilities of the situation were unlimited.

The bird was there, far from the cage, flushed with its first flight of freedom, eager to try its wings anew.

He would teach her to love him!—he threw his head back and took a deep breath; but not as a third "parent"—he laughed aloud.

"Candida," he murmured to himself with the vision it conjured up; the blue eyes, mischievous as a child's but honest as the name itself; her fantastic turns of speech, her joy in Bohemian ways.

Ah! what could be sweeter in this Southern sunburnt land—l'amore.

Instinctively he quickened his steps, springing along the rough dusty path.

When he got to the point, the old landlady outside her inn was sweeping the little square where the tables and chairs for her guests were stacked together.

"Buon giorno," he cried cheerily—"the Signorina is in?"

The woman looked up at him with her sharp peasant eyes and nodded her grey head.

He took out a card and after a moment's thought wrote upon it:

"The yellow dog and I are waiting in the piazza. Won't you come out for a little?" and sent the message up.

There was no sign from the empty balcony, but in a few minutes the landlady reappeared.

"The Signorina is sorry but she is busy packing; the Signorina is going away."

A shrewd smile came into her wrinkled face as she saw the young man's disappointment.

He looked at her steadily without a word, but his hand went to his pocket.

A gleam of avarice came into the tired old eyes and she leaned forward, her finger on her lips.

"The Signorina does not go until to-morrow."

She took the coin he held out and came a step closer. "She has trouble, the poor young lady—one has only to look at her eyes. Ahi! but we shall miss her too—so gay, non e vero? e così bella—she is busy now, but if the Signore would have patience, in the evening she will go down to the little beach with Tito—the padre's dog—the Signore must not say I told him, but my heart is full for the sight of her tears. Meanwhile, is there no message?"

But Derrick refused the bait.

"There is no message," he said coolly—"thank you all the same," and whistling to the dog, he passed on down the steps.

Meanwhile Candida in the bare room upstairs was packing defiantly, fighting over again the battle between instinct and principles which the sound of Derrick's voice had renewed, conquering a wild desire to run out in the sunshine and call him by his name.

She was doing right—that was the main thing. She repeated it over and over again with a growing realisation of the poverty of its consolatory powers.

Once she looked up at the big wooden cross, striving to awaken the dead beliefs of childhood, but her honest nature rejected the thought immediately. She must be strong enough in herself—not trust to outside props.

Still, it was hard—hard almost all to relinquish those golden days of freedom—to refuse love in the sunshine and go back to the gray, empty life.

So it was a very white-faced, sad-eyed Candida that found its way that evening to the little lonely beach.

And Derrick, as he emerged from the deep shadow of the Faraglioni felt a sudden throb of pity at the sight.

"Candida," he said gently and the girl started at the sound of his voice, with a quick glance at the upward path above her.

"No—don't go!—I *must* talk to you a little. Why are you so unkind to me?"

"I? . . . unkind!—" she faltered the words, her face averted, as he sat down on a low rock at her feet and for a moment a silence fell between them, broken by the faint murmur of the little waves splashing on the pebbly beach below.

"Yes," he said quietly at last, "and unjust too. You make me feel I have behaved like a brute—whereas all I have done is to let you see the thousandth part of the love I have for you in my heart."

"Hush!" she said, "you forget!" He twisted round suddenly and took one of the little brown hands between his own.

"I forget nothing," he answered her, "and I regret nothing! You are a clever woman and you are no longer a child; will you then listen to me patiently, if I try to explain myself? Surely it is not fair to judge me unheard."

She nodded her head slowly, not trusting her own voice.

"I am going to speak to you," he went on, "as if I were talking to my own soul—without hypocrisy or the orthodox veneer. May I, Candida?—you must give me your permission first."

The very gentleness of his voice soothed the

trouble in her heart and the temptation after her long and lonely fight to lean on the stronger judgment of the man was overwhelming.

"Yes," she said, "you have it."

He loosed her hand and turned a little, the moonlight falling on his clear-cut, earnest face, his eyes fixed on hers, as he chose his words thoughtfully.

"I believe in love," he began, "as the one great force in the world, the only overwhelming power strictly in touch with nature—or God—whichever you choose to call it. I believe in it as a great good; to ennoble, to purity and to broaden one's narrow life.

"But it must be free. I do not think it is possible real love can live in bondage; it sinks to a mere bargain of necessary give and take. It loses its spirit and becomes materialised.

"Morality, so-called, to my mind is purely geographical. Mahomedans, believing and living in the strictest rites of religion, practise plurality of wives. In Thibet, on the other hand, a woman, when she marries, becomes the joint property of her husband and his brothers. Are all these then to be called 'immoral'? No.

"It reverts then to a custom of the country, to the individual point of view and not to an actual sin."

He paused for a moment, looking out over the darkened sea.

"In England entailed property is safe-guarded by strict laws of matrimony. The natural disposition of the Englishman is towards external order—hug his failings as he may, under the rose!"—a note of scorn came into the steady voice. "Women there are brought up in the belief that to love outside the sanction of the church is not only damnatory but vulgar. Moreover if any woman is eclectic enough

to break away from the cage on wings of her own, she is socially pecked to death.

"Love then, in England, is reduced to the 'small change' of married life, legally milled at the edges to avoid possibility of fraud.

"But you and I"—he leaned forward eagerly—"would sooner rob the till, openly claiming our share in the deep stakes of love. Love with wings, love unbound, unpaid for—free!"

But she drew back with a little gesture of horror. "And what about honour?" she cried, "and duty, and self-respect?"

"Words," he said strongly, "mere words, beside love. Listen," he went on, as she sat there before him, her chin sunk on her hands, her brows contracted with thought. "I love you. I believe too, in time, I could make you," his voice sank, "love me as deeply. Whom do you harm?"

He saw the answer on her face and laughed suddenly.

"Geoffrey Clifton!—middle-aged student and recluse, glad to be left in peace—satisfied that the girl he married to soothe Mrs. Grundy's qualms should go forth alone into the dangerous South, beautiful, young, unprotected!"

He sprang to his feet with an exclamation—"I tell you—he brings it on himself—the first-fruits of his own selfishness—who else then?"

And again there came a little pause. Mechanically he stooped down to pick up a flat stone and sent it skimming across the smooth moonlit sea.

One, two, three, it struck the water again and disappeared and still Candida sat there, gazing out with inscrutable blue eyes.

He gave her a quick glance and continued:

"What about the injustice to yourself? the debt

that nature owes you? Are you to slowly sink through the long years to come into the lonely desert of middle-age? To wake, one morning and find that it is too late?—that love has passed you by! You, with your fresh young mind, your beautiful body, your soul. that would be a man's joy and pride and glory in life to own!"

His voice rose suddenly.

"Oh! my dear, my dear!—why can't we be happy?" He held out his arms to her.

"Love me!" he cried.

But she got up and faced him, her young face stern in the moonlight.

"No," she said, "I will *not*!" and he saw her set her teeth. "I have listened to you long enough. I have done you the justice you asked for—and now I will go. You have *your* point of view, your modern freedom of thought—no! licence is the word!"—there was anger in her voice, "but it is not mine, thank God! I may loathe the dullness and the emptiness of my life, I may break into sudden fits of revolt, but I hold the old clean doctrines, and I defy you"—she clenched her hands, her eyes flashing—"I defy you to lead me away from them by the force of a clever tongue!"

His face hardened suddenly—in a strange distinct likeness to the old Baronet at home. And even his voice when he spoke had the same queer touch of heredity.

"Very well," he said, "I apologise. I did not realise you were so deeply imbued with British prejudices! Nothing is further from my mind than an attempt to win you, against your own opinions." His voice rose suddenly in the strain of his disappointment. "Worship your own Gods—'Cold Christs and tangled Trinities' and may they bring

you comfort !—but leave me love—love unbound” —he stretched out his arms in sudden physical revolt. “God ! what a narrow world !” he cried.

With a little shiver she turned to go and suddenly his mood changed, as ever, broken by its own violence.

For there were tear-drops glistening on her lashes, and she looked so young, so frail and crushed even in her determination to resist, that his anger was swept away in a sudden flood of longing.

He threw himself before her, kneeling, his hot face hidden in the folds of her dress.

“Oh, forgive me !” he cried, “forgive me ! I am mad—but I love you so—and I cannot bear to part like this.”

She gave a little sob and for one moment her hand lay on his head, caressing unconsciously the smooth dark hair where the one white streak shone out in the moonlight.

“Good-bye,” she whispered, and then gently disengaging herself from his clinging hands, she passed up the narrow path, leaving the pebbly beach where he had first seen her, his little sun-worshipper, out of his life—as he then believed—for ever.

CHAPTER VII

But two days later Candida was still in the island; it was Derrick who had gone.

All that was left to her out of the golden fortnight, a letter, the first and the last from him that had reached her on the morning after their parting on the beach.

"I cannot bear to think," he wrote, "that it is I who am sending you back into the narrow cage. As a last request, let me beg you to stay on here in the sunshine you love for a little longer and to let me go instead.

"In any case I could not endure a single day without you in this place of memories.

"There is a boat calls in from Ischia early in the morning and by the time this reaches you I shall have gone. Think of me, if you can, a little kindly. If you but knew how I have suffered in the night you would have pity and forgive.

"I love you so—farewell!"

And that was all.

She walked slowly down the Via Krupp, skirting the walls of the old half-ruined monastery.

It was only two days since he had left, but she had tasted to the full the cup of loneliness.

The whole face of the island seemed changed, and to aid the delusion the spell of sunshine itself was broken.

For heavy clouds were banked up over the sea and the air was close and oppressive with the uneasy stillness of an approaching storm.

Not a leaf stirred, not a flutter of wind rustled the dusty palms; the island waited, holding its breath in the silence of heavy oppression.

She had turned the bend of the road and was moving on aimlessly towards the Piccola Marina when a stir in the air above made her lift her head.

It was the beating of myriad wings, sweeping along through the stillness.

She looked at the birds with interest. Surely it was not yet time for the homeward-bound swallows to migrate?

Besides, as they swooped nearer to the earth in their flight, she saw there were birds of all kinds, a mixed and motley flock.

As she watched them in growing astonishment they paused beyond her, circled wildly and descended on the slope of Monte Solaro, with a fluttering of wings that flashed black and silver against the sullen sky.

Never before on those southern shores had she seen so many together. As she reached the lower level by the sea they rose again and after a preliminary flight started off, a vast fluttering fan, following the leader in a straight line across the oily water.

Candida was genuinely puzzled.

Where could they be going, in this definite and concerted plan to leave the land—and why?

She turned to the yellow dog on the sand beside her with a sudden touch of impatience.

"If you could only speak, cane mio!—I suppose you know all about it and are laughing at me in your sleeve. How hot you look, you poor fat thing!"

For the dog was panting distressfully, its nose thrust forward on its paws, its red tongue hanging out, its whole attitude protesting against the heat of the afternoon.

"It is stifling," said Candida, "you're quite right, my friend—I believe we're going to have a storm, and between you and me, I'm an awful coward, so I think we'd better be getting home."

She turned round with a last look in the direction of the birds' flight. A pale orange glow was creeping over the sky above the dense band of encircling clouds and the sea was leaden with oily streaks that stretched like pathways across it.

She gave a little shudder. Surely life was depressing enough just now without nature adding her touch of gloom.

"Come along, my pretty gingerbread," she whistled to the dog, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

But to her surprise the animal did not stir. She went on for a few yards, fully expecting to hear the weighty patter of following feet; but in vain.

Then she turned back. The yellow dog raised his head a moment, where he lay outstretched, sniffing the air.

Then to her great bewilderment, his pink nose went down on his paws and he began to whimper distressfully.

"Good Heavens!" she cried, "you're never going mad, are you?—that would be the last straw!"

She bent down and stroked him gently, albeit a little nervously, and again he raised his head and sniffed the air, his brown eyes full of uneasiness.

Instinctively she did the same and smiled.

"You quaint creature," she cried, "you're quite right—there is a funny smell! What can it be? It's like burning—no, it's not"—she puzzled for a

moment—"it's sulphur," she decided.

The yellow dog rolled slowly on to his feet. He had arrived at his own conclusions and like the birds his instinct counselled flight.

Candida gave a sigh of relief.

"That's better," she said encouragingly, "I shan't have to carry you home after all, and you are a weight, you know."

With one of the swift returns she so much dreaded, her mind swung back to the day she had lifted him over the wall.

Only two weeks ago! Why, it seemed a year—a slice cut out of eternity.

"I love my love with a D—his name is Derrick."

Ah! it was true, but a child's game no longer. It was life, cruel life, as the ache at her heart testified.

She set her teeth, thrusting the thoughts away. She would not think of him. She would fight with this weakness and overcome it.

She stumbled over a stone and put her hand out against the wall of rock.

Phew! how hot it was—she drew her fingers away with an exclamation. This livid glare was worse than the brightest hours of sunshine.

In front the yellow dog rolled along, his head drooping wearily. When he got to the old path towards the point, panic seized him, and with a sudden lurch forward he quickened into a trot. In a few minutes he was out of sight.

"Even the yellow dog," said Candida sadly. Was she doomed for ever to be alone? And the deep voice came back, haunting her, with the faint brogue it gained in moments of strong excitement.

"One day, to awake and find it is all too late—that love has passed you by."

Ah! how hard it was. She climbed wearily at last up the wooden stairs and worn out, body and mind, threw herself on to the narrow bed. In the fading light, with the lurid glare over the sea, the wooden cross above her shone out crude and white and added its eternal suggestion of man's injustice and mortal pain.

She pressed her hot face into the pillow as if by sheer force. She would wipe out the memory of his lips, the touch of his fingers on her hair; and a fragment of verse ran into her head with a sing-song, haunting persistence.

"Ah! it was mad, and bad, and sad—But then—how it was sweet!"

A wild feeling of revolt surged up in her. Why should she throw her life away, her chance of happiness, that splendid gift of youth and strength for a mere chimera?—again the apt suggestion, for a "custom of the country" that she lived in.

There was love too to be dealt with as well as honour and duty. "Words, mere words!" sang her heart.

She would go to him and tell him. Tell him that she loved him; that he was right; that love must be free. And together they would sail for a far land of sunshine, beyond the grey English shores, where nature reigned supreme and even the "custom of the country" would be satisfied.

Boom . . . !

She sat up in bed, startled, pushing the heavy hair from off her face. What was that? A cannon? A fog at sea? It couldn't be.

And yet it had shaken the room where she lay in the dark, like a far distant explosion.

What an extraordinary thing! She got up quickly as the old landlady brought in her solitary dinner

on a tray, panting from her climb up the heavy stairs.

She rattled it down on the bare table, "E buon' appetito, Signorina," she invoked and departed to serve in the little bar below.

But Candida hardly glanced at the food. The heat was stifling and she noticed again the strong sulphurous smell that had puzzled her down below on the Piccola Marina.

She went to the open window and peered out through the gloom. If only the storm would break and shatter this silence; and she longed for the thunder's roll, as a sick child lies and longs for the first pale light of dawn.

But when she went to bed, tired out with her lonely vigil, the storm had seemed no nearer.

She sank into a restless sleep, tossing from side to side, vaguely frightened and uneasy, to be suddenly roused at last.

Boom . . . ! There it was again, but louder, with more insistence of vibration, shaking the very earth and echoing through the stillness of the night from cliff to cliff.

She sprang out of bed with a real feeling of fear and lighted the single candle.

Boom . . . ! What in Heaven's name was it?

Her heart was beating wildly as she snatched up a wrap and opened the door of her room. Outside all was darkness and silence. She did not even know where the old woman slept and after a minute of indecision she came in again and shut the door.

It was twelve o'clock; the hour when Mother Earth turns in her sleep, boards creak and churchyards stir.

Candida sat down on the edge of her bed, fighting for control.

This was worse than loneliness—this was sheer physical fear.

And now she caught herself longing for the sound to come again, her nerves strained, her ears on the alert.

One, two, three, four, she counted in desperation aloud and somewhere far away a cock crew lustily. Instinctively the sound with its suggestion of healthy country life, lifted the terror from her mind.

In an hour or two she knew the dawn would be stealing in; bare-footed peasants would set forth towards the vines, the world would awake to life and across the narrow strip of deep blue water dividing them, she felt with the inner knowledge of love that Derrick was thinking of her, still bound to her side invisibly by the silver thread of Fate.

She blew out the candle resolutely and lay down to sleep. "I love you so—farewell . . ."

The words rang in her ears and she felt strangely comforted as she slipped away into happy oblivion.

But in the morning when she awoke, the terror was to return.

For a pall of darkness lay over the sunny land. She rubbed her eyes in bewilderment as the little clock chimed eight; and for a moment she caught at the suggestion of closed shutters.

She sat up in bed. No—they were wide open as she had left them throughout the stifling night.

Faintly in the distance she could trace the line of the sea, but over the island like a shroud lay the uncanny gloom and every now and then a hot wind blew, bringing in its wake the acrid smell of sulphur.

"It is Vesuvio," said the old woman volubly as she came in with the coffee. "Madonna! what a night! The Signorina, being young, would doubtless sleep." As for herself she had not closed an eye and if the ashes came now, the tourist season would be spoiled—and the vines too—what misfortune for all!

Vesuvio? It was an eruption then! The memory of the fiery portent on the night of the Tarantella flashed into her mind; the flight of the birds before the coming danger, the uneasy behaviour of the usually polite yellow dog.

An eruption! She got up and dressed hurriedly and joined in the growing crowd that was moving up towards the piazza in the town.

When she got to the terrace overhanging the bay, it was packed with people from end to end.

She forced her way through steadily and reaching the parapet, stood for a moment—aghast!

From the open mouth of the great mountain flames were leaping and the glow of its mighty breath illumined the sky. Vast volumes of smoke poured upwards to meet the heavy clouds, where in twisted flashes, forked lightning, the accumulation of unchained electricity—played intermittently.

Crawling down its southern slope, with deadly precision, two red hot streams of lava were pouring, pointing fiery arrows towards the sea, and every now and then from these there would come a flash, as though in its deadly course the lava had touched a match. Candida heard an Englishman behind her explain the phenomena to his daughter.

"That is the lava reaching a dwelling—look!" he pointed with his finger, "it flares up you see, passes over the ruins and is gone—that little stream is probably five or six hundred yards high up there."

Boom . . . ! A great vomit of flame and rocks and lava and the island shook with the effort of the mother shore, vibrating in sympathy.

Candida shrank against the wall. The girl behind her laughed, the cool laugh of the sixteen-year-old hockey-miss of Britain.

"A regular Brock's Benefit!" she said, "I'm glad we're in for this."

But her brother shook his head. "You wait," he suggested pleasantly—"you haven't come to the discomforts yet—wait for the ashes and the smells and other less amusing possibilities such as an earthquake or a tidal wave! I vote we clear out."

"Nonsense," said the elder man, "he's only saying it to frighten you, Dora. We ought to be quite safe here—fifteen miles away across the sea."

"I'm not frightened," said the girl calmly—"only I'm afraid it may upset mother. Shall we go back to her now?"

As they turned away Candida caught the brother's reply.

"It's all very well, but last time they had a big show like this, a mountain came up out of the sea in a single night—it's just beyond Pozzuoli—I've seen it; and if these things *can* happen, we might just as well go down. There'll be an awful rush for the steamer. I vote we get our tickets."

All that morning Candida spent on the terrace, hypnotised by the monster across the bay, but as the day wore on and the eruption gathered in force, the clouds descended, black with mingled ashes and smoke, slowly blotting out the mountain from sight, except for the fiery glow that even the density of the atmosphere could not altogether veil.

And the darkness deepened and the island shook

and the smell of the sulphur, stifling, nauseating, penetrated the air.

As she retraced her steps towards the Punto Tragara, the dust rose on the hot wind and swirled up round her, leaving a fine white layer on her dark serge skirt. She brushed it off with her bare hands and gave a little exclamation—for it was sharp like powdered glass. Later she understood the reason. It was the outrider of the scourge of ashes.

CHAPTER VIII

When she awoke, next morning, it was to find that the island, like a woman in mortal grief, had turned grey in a single night.

Not a blade of grass shewed green, not an olive tree but bore its heavy cloak of ashes; and the air was clouded with it, like a thin, impalpable veil, driven this way and that at the bidding of the hot blasts of wind that swept across the narrow sea from the burning mountain beyond.

The heavy gloom still prevailed and everywhere one heard a sound of lamentation.

For if the rain came now, as it threatened to do, it would turn the metallic deposit into a hard mass of concrete, closing the pores of Mother Earth and killing every form of crop.

As it was, the water in the open roof cisterns was contaminated and already unfit for use—a real disaster when, as Candida remembered, there was but one natural spring in the island, supplemented by barrels sent over daily from Sorrento.

During the long night she had reproached herself bitterly for forgetting the old maid left alone in Naples and had decided to return to her as quickly as possible.

So early that morning she had packed up her belongings and set forth for the town.

The ashes stung her face and hands and half-blinded her through the thick veil she wore, but at last she reached Morgano's and went into the café to ascertain the exact hour of the steamer's departure.

The old man, soured by the prospect of a ruined season, greeted her with unusual gruffness.

"Ma!" his hands went out expressively. "There was no boat—what did the Signora expect? The crossing was too bad—there was danger of falling cinders and it had not come in over night. There were no letters, no papers, no provisions!"

Candida stood there stunned as full comprehension dawned upon her.

The island was cut off. There was no escape open. She would *have* to stay!

She ventured again timidly, in her broken Italian, "And when did the Signor Morgano believe there would be a boat?"

But he only glared at her over the top of his horn spectacles as he shook his rough old head.

"Impossible to say—they were in the hands of God and Vesuvio."

The conjunction was overpowering and with a sinking at her heart she left him and fought her way through the increasing storm of ashes up to the terrace over the bay.

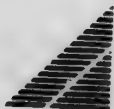
But the mountain and even the shore were obliterated by dense black clouds and the sea was devoid of life, breaking in short angry waves as though it too felt the agitation of its fathoms deep bed.

Here and there loitered groups of Caprese, their hair white with the insidious dust, giving their brown faces a pinched, prematurely-aged expression; and every now and then a volley of ashes would shoot from off the roofs, where anxious householders



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were sweeping away the accumulation of the night from above their hoarded water supply.

Towards noon, a French yacht put in, by way of Ischia, and news ran like wildfire from mouth to mouth.

A tale of burnt villages and ruined crops, and of hundreds of homeless victims, wailing and protesting as they joined in the exodus of terror from the once fertile slopes.

Ottajano and Bosco Trecase were destroyed, Pompeii itself was threatened; Naples sunk deep in ashes.

Religious excitement had run amok, culminating in a miracle near Portici, where on the eve of destruction the statue of Our Lady, elevated at the northern angle of the village, had saved the whole community alive, turning the fiery stream aside ere the lava had touched the outer wall of the shrine.

Candida, as she listened to the old landlady's fervent recital, hardly knew whether to laugh or cry.

Towards night a fishing boat from Amalfi, driven to refuge on the Piccola Marina before a violent gust of ashes, brought with it a history of further tragedies.

In Naples a reign of terror had set in. The streets were nearly impassible, balconies and in some cases badly-constructed roofs giving way under the weight of ashes.

In and out of the deep drifts the scum of the town were loose, pilfering, looting and settling dangerous scores under cover of the perpetual night. It was no longer safe to venture abroad, with the closed hotels and fast-shuttered shops.

A crazy friar had arisen, haranguing the panic-

stricken populace.

It was not Vesuvio alone, he thundered in their ears; it was Armageddon, the day of the last reckoning!

Woe unto the despoiler of monasteries, who dared to lay his hand on the anointed of the Lord! Destruction was on the wing. Lo, the monster had arisen, the fiery beast with seven horns. It was the judgment day!

Under the spur of his frenzied tongue the mob had broken loose.

They had stormed the cathedral en masse, beating aside the trembling priests and torn San Januarius, the patron saint of Naples, from among his seven altars, and bearing the statue on high through the streets, called on his name in hysterical frenzy to save them from the wrath to come.

The station was in the hands of the Carabinieri, vainly endeavouring to check the crowds of terrified tourists who poured in unceasingly and fought for places on the congested Northern trains.

The lava had crossed the line above Castellamare, cutting off the direct route south—the telegraph wires were down, the postal authorities impotent.

Last sign of the times, more paralysing still to the English-speaking visitors, "Cook's" had failed them! Cook—the panacea for all foreign ills—had basely fled to Rome leaving an empty bank!

And far away, up in the awful heat and stench of the volcano, one man stuck to his post, alone; face to face with the appalling cataclysm of nature, staring death in the eyes with the philosophy of supreme heroism, in the stifling cabin of the Observatory—the scientist Manteacchi.

But to Candida there was no possible outlook, and she blamed herself again and again for parting from the old servant.

She could not bear to think of Susan ; Susan with her dread of "foreign ways," her horror of "popery"—her scorn of anything "un-English."

And then her mind would fly to Derrick, with all the anxiety of her new-born love. Where was he?—in the midst of these wild scenes, she feared for him, with his Irish impulsiveness.

Then round again to herself. What was she to do? The answer was obvious—wait! Meanwhile to her perplexity she found her ready money was running short. She could not issue a draft on Cook's, for Cook's was closed, and there was no agent now that she knew of nearer than Rome.

She could not wire to her husband—the Semaphore station was useless.

The old landlady apologised for the meagreness of the dinner. All meat came over from the mainland, vegetables, and in fact every form of food but goat's milk and eggs. Her butter-tub was low too; would the Signora mind oil with her bread? It was the finest oil and the custom of the country; in fact many preferred it; but then, the Signorina, she was not not one of themselves—a cat could see that!

Candida smiled into the wrinkled old face, divining her anxiety.

"It is all right, mother—I can eat anything—do not worry thyself."

Thus encouraged the landlady hesitated, her bright eyes searching the girl's sad ones.

"It is a pity the English Signore is gone," she threw the arrow at venture, "it is the more lonely for the Signorina in all this trouble," and as Candida

instinctively stiffened, she went on volubly—

"Madonna! but it is in truth an eruption. I remember the last, eleven years since, but it was nothing compared to this." She crossed herself suddenly. "May the good God protect us," she added, with a glance up at the cross, "and Our Lady and all the Saints."

Candida watched her depart a little wistfully. For a moment she envied the peasant the sincerity of her beliefs.

"I expect the good God is far too busy just now," she decided with a smile, but her blue eyes were full of thought.

As she got up from her lonely meal, to her joy, she heard the sharp asthmatic bark of her friend, the yellow dog.

She threw the windows open and went out on the balcony. For a time the dust had ceased as a contrary breeze blew up from the sea and here and there the bigger stars were visible.

There was a scuffle in the aloes below as the household cat retired in haste, and she could see the excited yellow head poking about in vain pursuit of his quarry.

A sudden longing for the fresher air overcame her and putting on her hat and coat she ran down into the piazza below and whistled to the dog.

He came pounding along through the dust with one regretful glance at the scene of his sport, and together they set out along the upward path.

Wrapped in its winding sheet the corpse of the once green island lay revealed in the clearing light.

Through a rift in the heavy clouds the moon looked down, a feathery halo around her head, in blank astonishment.

And well she might—for that night ashes fell lightly in the streets of Paris!—the farthest message of fire.

As Candida passed up the main street of the town she paused for a moment to peer in through the open door of the "Hei-dei-gei-gei."

Beer-drinkers in plenty there were, for the dust brought thirst, but no sound of music or clatter of dancing feet.

By the time she reached the terrace she felt a desire for further exercise. The steady movement was soothing her nerves; she had no fear of the kindly Capri folk and boldly set out on the winding road that led down to the Grande Marina.

At the harbour they might give her the assurance of a coming steamer, or even if that failed, there might be later news drifting in from some stray benighted fishing-boat.

So on she went steadily, turn upon turn, until she reached the open beach below.

At the door of the custom-house a group of men stood looking out to sea and as the foremost one turned at the sound of her step Candida recognised Giuseppe who had taken her the round of the caves with Derrick but a few days since.

"Buona sera," he greeted her, with obvious pleasure. "The Signorina is wise to take advantage of the calm, for it is not to last. To-night the wind will change," he glanced up at the sky, "and the accursed ashes will return. It is an evil time for all!"

She nodded her head gravely, looking up in his swarthy face.

"There is no chance of a steamer yet?"

"Ma——" his shoulders went up expressively, "chi lo sa? When the hot cinders cease—they

cannot pass through the breath of fire."

"What are they watching for?" She glanced at the knot of men, staring out over the angry water.

"It is a boat. If the Signorina will but look along my arm——" he pointed out towards a black dot that bobbed up and down, now rising on a wave, now hidden from sight. "It is from Sorrento, we think. Madonna! what a night to venture forth. They must have held their life by the ears in the cross-currents beyond the point. But the water is smoother here, they will make the island safely."

She stood for a time in silence watching the black dot grow in size.

"There will be six men rowing," said a keen-eyed youngster suddenly.

Giuseppe put up his hand to shield his sight as he leaned forward against a wooden post.

"But no!—it is four," he decided, "watch, and you will see the moon strike on the wet oars, two on either side."

The waves were breaking against the end of the long stone pier, throwing up showers of silvery foam and Candida, whistling to the yellow dog, walked cautiously along the slippery arm to within a few yards of the point.

She sat down on some baulks of timber and watched the moonlit scene, and for the first time during the long hours of trouble and suspense, a feeling of peace stole over her with an odd sense of companionship.

She stroked the dog's head, white with ashes. "They've turned you into a powdered footman, my friend," she told him, as he nuzzled up against her knee, his faithful brown eyes fixed on her face.

And ever and anon she looked at the distant boat fighting its way so bravely through the dark water, and she wondered what news it would bring from the convulsed country beyond.

Her heart went out to the homeless, ruined peasantry but a week ago tending the vines on the fertile slopes, looking forward to a bounteous harvest; now outcast and devoid of any means of support—in many cases, perhaps, mourning their dead.

What was her sorrow compared to theirs? And she took herself to task with an uncomfortable suspicion of having played the coward.

Then the haunting face of Derrick flashed up before her mental vision, with the word "Never"—written upon it and her eyes clouded again as she gazed out at the approaching boat.

"It's all very well to preach," she addressed the yellow dog, as he sat squarely beside her, sniffing the salted air, "but it's jolly hard when you love a man, cane mio!—and 't's no good mincing matters, that I can see. I lo e him with all my heart!"

She gave a quick glance around, guiltily almost, as the words left her lips; but they were alone, far from listening ears and she went on with her steady confession.

The yellow dog wagged his tail ponderously under her caressing hand. This was a new rôle to him and beyond his comprehension, but he feigned to understand.

"I love him"—she took a deep breath,—“better than life itself,” she decided slowly, “and I shall never see him again.”

For a moment the pier ran blurred before her eyes.

"*Never!*" she said desperately. She rose to her feet. The boat was quite close now; she could see the backs of the rowers bent to their work.

Yes. Giuseppe was right, there were only four at the oars, but they carried a fifth man who sat in the stern, steering.

Something about the tall figure riveted her attention, the set of his broad shoulders, the outline of his head.

A sudden wild hope sprang up in her breast, and she clasped her hands together, her heart beating wildly as she leaned forward, her eyes glued on the incoming boat.

It seemed an eternity before they dropped into the smoother water of the harbour and were hailed by the group of fishermen with open curiosity and congratulation.

"*Si—si! di Sorrento—a devil of a crossing.*"

Slowly the boat swung up beside the pier, the tall man gave the word "*Ship oars!*" and sprang ashore, with a stiff gesture of relief.

As in a dream, she moved forward to the landing-stage and Derrick stood before her, hatless, soaked with salt-water, his face white in the moonlight save where a scar, red and angry, shewed that a falling cinder had left its mark.

"*Candida!*"—the word broke from him as he recognised the girl.

He did not even offer her his hand, but his eyes betrayed his secret for all the world to guess.

"*I have broken my word, you see,*" his voice showed strong control. "*I have come back. I could not bear to think of you—in all this—alone!*"

So great was her relief in the maddening joy of his unexpected presence that she gave a little laugh.

But it ended in a sob, wrung from her tired nerves.

"Thank God," she answered him unsteadily; and the next moment she was in his arms.

CHAPTER IX

Derrick slept that night at a little inn on the beach. He wanted to keep an eye on his men and have them ready without fail early next morning for the return journey.

Not until afterwards did Candida realise the difficulties he had had to cope with to induce the superstitious sailors to set forth from Sorrento. But at last greed at the size of the bait had overcome not only their dread of hot ashes and angry sea, but the long arm of the Camorra—that secret power of the South whose unwritten law forbade their venturing beyond the given radius of proscribed fishing-ground.

The day dawned—as Giuseppe had prophesied—in a cloud of ashes and gloom, but brought Candida with it from the town above, dust-wreathed but radiant, her blue eyes shining through the thick veil she wore, her luggage piled up behind her in the rickety little carriage.

To escape, and above all, to escape with him!—what mattered the ashes and the darkness? It lent out wings to her feet.

Derrick, with a silent pressure of the little hand, helped her into the boat.

The sailors were gloomy in the reaction from last night's carousal when their budget of news had

carried them much hospitality ashore, and they gazed at the murky sky with ominous shakes of the head.

But nothing could dim the splendid spirits of the girl. In the dark hours of the night she had resolved upon her plan of action.

There was to be a brief respite from her pain; a free gift sent by Fate because they parted for ever.

And she would enjoy it to the uttermost, without analysis, without fear; in the spirit of their earlier days, the sheer innocent joy of companionship.

She could not see the harm. It would be one golden moment to look back to in the grey and lonely years to come.

She snatched at it as a drowning man a straw—it was theirs by right of love—no one could interfere!

And Derrick, as his eyes met hers, wondered at her beauty.

"Let me tell you," she said gaily as she tucked herself up comfortably beside the steersman, drawing the heavy tarpaulin over her knees, "I am an excellent sailor—so there goes one worry for you overboard. I shall neither turn pea-green nor pray for land. I am going to enjoy myself. My only grief is the absence of the yellow dog. I looked for him in vain to bid him good-bye, and I suppose he is still asleep in that mysterious home I have never been able to locate."

"He belongs to the parish priest, I believe." Derrick smiled down at the bright face but in his heart he was anxious.

Would it have been wiser to wait for the steamer?

He recalled her urgent objection to delay, her

fears for the old servant in Naples alone, and, what had weighed with him most of all, the danger of typhoid in the cut-off island with its contaminated and slowly decreasing water-supply.

Meanwhile the oars dipped steadily and in an incredibly short time the shores vanished and the darkness swallowed them up.

The faint glow of the shrouded volcano was their only guide and once a luminous fan of light spread and vanished over the troubled water.

It was the search-light of the Italian battleship despatched by Government to the scene of the disaster, but useless, under the rain of ashes, and compelled reluctantly to lie far out from land.

Otherwise, no sign of life.

The boat rose and fell as the men bent to their oars. Once the youngest sailor broke into song—

"Era Lucia—la bella Luci' . . . a. ." but awed by the heavy silence the words died away before the end of the verse.

A hot wind caught them, bringing in its wake ashes that fell with a crisp pattering sound and Derrick ordered the girl down to the bottom of the boat with a note of authority in his voice that betrayed his rising anxiety.

"Pull that cloak well over your head—please," he added. "Wait a minute," he laid a hand on her shoulder—"if you sit like that, you can lean against my knees; it will be more comfortable and steady the boat."

He turned his collar up and pulled his cap down over his eyes.

Now they were in for it!

One of the sailors rapped out an oath as a burning cinder caught him on the knuckles.

The air was full of little stinging demons. "Keep well under," said Derrick; he pulled the cloak up, covering her head completely and he felt her shrink back with a little shiver against his knees.

"And don't be frightened, my darling," he bent low and whispered the words and a muffled voice came up—

"It's not for myself—but you?—up there, exposed to it all."

Derrick laughed suddenly in the joy of her tender thought for him.

"I'm pretty tough," he said, "my complexion will stand it."

One of the sailors broke the silence.

"E la Signorina—is she not afraid?"

A wave caught the boat and tipped her down into the trough of the sea.

"No," said Derrick gravely, "she is not afraid. She has a good courage and will bring us luck."

The man nodded his head.

"May the Saints preserve her," he invoked and settled down with renewed vigour to his work.

The storm of ashes swept past them and the air cleared a little.

Candida, hot and tumbled, emerged from the stifling cloak.

She took a deep breath and peered out through the gloom.

The waves were higher now, and topped with white curling crests.

"I should stay as you are," said Derrick, "it may get a bit rough presently, and"—he tried to catch her eyes but she looked steadily away—"it is so nice to feel you near me."

She smiled back at him impulsively, but soon

his whole attention was claimed by the tossing boat.

They were getting into the dangerous cross-currents below the point of the mainland where the incoming and outward-bound seas fought in mid-channel.

The waves grew higher and higher, breaking with an angry murmur, and to steer steadily across them was no easy task.

Suddenly they shipped a heavy sea, soaking the girl where she lay, in a bath of ice-cold water.

She was on her knees in a minute wringing out her skirts.

"Give me something to bail with!" she cried, "I can at least do that."

"I can't leave off steering," said Derrick through set teeth, his eyes watching a monster rolling up from afar, "but there's a locker under my feet. Can you open it and find something for yourself?"

She groped with both hands and triumphantly produced a battered saucepan from amidst the odds and ends of rope and tackle and empty flasks of wine.

"What could be better?" she cried.

"E permesso?"—she waved it in the sailors' faces and her gay young voice above the note of the storm cheered them as nothing else could.

On they went, tossing and straining, shipping the cold gray waves, which Candida as steadily bailed out, fighting the elements gallantly, with ever the glow of Vesuvius growing nearer and nearer.

Once the hot ashes returned but the girl went on deliberately, deaf to Derrick's entreaties, dodging the big cinders and hearing the smaller ones sizzle as they fell on the wet chestnut curls.

Her arms ached, her knees where the wet skirts clung around her felt cold as ice.

But she was fighting for both, she told herself, in a good fight with the man she loved.

And suddenly the heavy strain slackened, the waves smoothed out under them, and they were in the sheltered bay of Sorrento, safe!

As the boat straightened itself, she got up a little unsteadily with a deep sigh of thankfulness.

"Oh! I'm so glad, and so tired!" she cried as she sank down on the seat by Derrick. "It's over, isn't it?"

"Thank God, yes," said the man.

He gave a quick glance of remorse at her white, exhausted face.

"Poor child! my poor little girl, I couldn't bear to see you but I daren't stop steering a minute. Can't you curl up and rest a little now? You have been so brave, it was wonderful. I never saw anything like it in a woman before and I believe without your help we should not have won through."

The boat rocked easily in the smoother water and the sailors leaned over their oars, taking a well-earned spell of rest.

Derrick rolled up the cloak and slipped it under Candida's head, as she lay in sheer exhaustion on the wet seat beside him.

He looked at her anxiously and raised his voice.

"Twenty liras more apiece if we are into Sorrento within the hour. The Signorina is wet to the skin and dead beat. Without her I doubt if we should have ever reached land."

The foremost sailor turned with a quick patter of dialect to his companions; then back to Derrick with a smile.

"We will do it Signore, but not for the money—we will do it for the Signorina's sake. Madonna! what courage!" and they bent to their oars again.

Candida lay peacefully, her eyes closed, resting her aching limbs. She was very tired but strangely happy too.

She had shown no fear. For once those unruly nerves of hers had answered the call of brain.

Moreover she had helped ; helped bravely and he had praised her, her lover, her king of men. And life was very sweet.

But for all that, by the time they reached the landing-stage of the hotel, her teeth were chattering in her head and a band of dull pain pressed round her brow.

The payment of the sailors seemed an endless ceremony as she sat in a tired heap on the slope of the garden and watched Derrick with numbed hands count over the dirty notes.

At last it was over and the men, with hearty farewell salutes had trooped back to the boat leaving the wet luggage piled up beside her.

She tried to rise to her feet, but her head spun round and with a word of protest Derrick bent down and gathered her up in his arms.

"Just this once," he urged, "let me have my own way, dearest." And so, her tired head against his shoulder, her heart beating against his heart, in a strange mist of content, she was carried up the steep path to the door of the hotel.

He crossed the empty hall and with the little wet figure still in his arms, strode up the stairs to a room on the first floor, opened the door without knocking, and walked boldly in.

In the uncertain light before the mirror a man in shirt sleeves paused with his razor in his hand obviously in the act of shaving and stared at the intruders.

Derrick laid his burden gently on the bed.

"This is my room," he said in Italian sternly, "what are you doing here?"

To his surprise the original occupant after a quick glance in his direction answered him in English.

"There must be some mistake, I think. I only arrived last night and was told this room was at liberty, but if the lady is ill——"

He paused courteously as he looked at the prostrate figure on the bed.

Derrick's tired face relaxed. The man was English and a gentleman.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I feel sure there has been, as you say, a mistake. We have had a bad crossing from Capri in an open boat."

The stranger gave an exclamation of horror. "My goodness, this weather!" He wiped his razor and slipped it into the case and looked round for his coat.

"I slept over there last night," continued Derrick, "but kept this room on; it has been mine for a week. I expect that scamp of a landlord must have let it on the sly."

But at this moment a fat little Frenchman, breathless and apologetic, appeared in the doorway.

"Ah! Monsieur le Capitaine, I regret very much, I must explain—but this gentleman, we did not expect—by such a sea——" he cast up his hands.

But the fair-haired stranger cut him short peremptorily.

"Give me another room at once," he said, "and have my things moved."

He slipped his coat on with a quick glance at the semi-conscious Candida and strode out into the

corridor, where Derrick followed him.

"It's awfully good of you," he said, "and I don't at all like turning you out. But we've had such a bucketing and she's been bailing out the boat most of the way over and is absolutely done."

His voice shewed his distress and the sailor's face was sympathetic.

"Don't bother about me," he said heartily, "I shall be alright, but get hot grog and blankets and everything warm you can for her, or you'll have her down with fever in this climate. Here's Rosina," he stopped a pleasant-faced chambermaid and explained matters in fluent Italian and she sped away promptly to obey his orders.

"That's all right, she'll see to your wife"—Derrick started involuntarily—"she's a good sort, is Rosina; and look here, never mind about my kit at present, I've everything I want; that can come out later on."

"I'm most awfully obliged," said Derrick.

Then, as he turned away, a thought struck him.

"I wonder where all mine has gone to—and there are the things we brought over with us, still down at the landing-stage."

He gave an anxious glance back at the open door.

"I'll see to it," said his new friend promptly. "You go to your wife and leave it to me," and with a nod of encouragement, he swung down the passage cheerily as Derrick hurried back to Candida.

He bent over the prostrate figure on the bed, his heart beating with anxiety, but she opened her eyes and smiled back at him bravely.

He took her little cold hand in his and covered it with kisses.

"This is your room now," he said gently. "It's

all arranged and no one will disturb you. The chambermaid is coming directly with hot things for you. Will you let her help you into bed and get really warm as soon as ever you can?"

And even as he spoke the good soul bustled in, a steaming glass in her hand.

Derrick helped the little figure to sit up, one arm supporting her shoulders as he lifted the cordial to her lips.

Her blue eyes spoke back her gratitude and as she sipped it a little colour stole into her pale cheeks.

"You will get out of these wet things," he begged, "and I will go now, if first you tell me you are alright."

But she held the glass up to him.

"Do take some," she said softly as she laid a hand on his wet sleeve, "you are soaked yourself."

He drank a little to please her.

"A loving-cup," he whispered, "and now I'm off—but I shall come back later to see how you are."

His eyes fell on a ribbon that hung around her neck, on which was run a plain gold ring. In the stress of the storm it had slipped out from the folds of her dress.

With quick fingers he undid the knot and held it out to her.

She watched him gravely and without a word replaced her wedding-ring on her hand.

"No use in being the Signorina any longer, is there?" He tried to speak lightly, but the tears sprang up into her eyes.

"You know—I didn't mean—to deceive you?" The words were so low, he hardly caught them, but with the lover's intuition he guessed their import.

He nodded his head gravely.

"I know," he whispered and with that, stifling the ardent longing he felt to smother the tired face with kisses, he called Rosina and left the room.

CHAPTER X

But the perilous crossing was to leave more lasting effects; and for three days and nights Candida tossed about in high fever and delirium; calling out that she was "afraid, afraid!" the lava was coming nearer, the ashes closing over her head.

Then the beloved name, piteously again and again, "Derrick—Derrick—Derrick!"

The Italian doctor's face grew grave as he learned that not so long before she had battled through a serious attack of congestion of the lungs.

He suggested a nursing sister, but Derrick shrank from the gloomy figure in its severe nun's uniform.

He and Rosina could do all that was necessary and he was no novice in sickness; he had nursed Julian Dirke unaided through a bad bout of fever in Rome but a year since.

Moreover to do anything for the woman he loved was a joy and as he deceived himself "a duty," since it was mainly through him her illness had occurred.

In the hotel they were firmly accepted as husband and wife. He slept in a room adjoining hers, the door between ajar, to wake at the slightest sound.

A dozen times in the first two nights he would steal through and cover the shoulders of the restless form as she tossed and flung the blankets off in her

fever or with gentle persuasion give Candida the medicine the doctor pinned his faith to.

And a new quality crept into his love; a feeling of deep reverence, a return to the old boyish awe of her sex, which shewed itself by the bare fact that, throughout her long spell of semi-consciousness, he never even attempted to kiss the little hand.

Once as he bent over her, smoothing out the ruffled pillow, his heart gave a great throb as he caught the quick words rising to her lips.

"I love him, cane mio, it's no good pretending now, I love him—better than life itself."

And a sudden horrible fear shook him, that indeed it might be her life she would lose!

But he trusted in her strong vitality, the force of her glowing youth, and he was not deceived.

Only John Newcomen, his new-found friend, knew the secret of their strange relations.

He had opened his keen blue eyes at first, but had soon realised that it was the only possible plea they could offer the world at large or rather that small and chiefly foreign contingent sheltering from the force of the eruption at the quiet Sorrento hotel.

There were dangers of course in the lie, but far fewer than if the beginnings of a scandal were to float abroad; there was nothing to excite comment in an Englishman's devoting himself to his sick young wife upstairs.

It was the captain who discovered a means of communicating with the maid at Naples.

"You can't get her here," he told the anxious Derrick, "it's quite impossible at present; the line is all under lava at Portici and there are no steamers yet."

"Can't I get some form of message to her?"

Cand—" he pulled himself up, " Mrs. Clifton will be so upset, when she recovers enough to remember. I should like to save her this worry at least."

And he racked his brains in vain; but the day following an unlooked-for solution appeared, for early in the morning Newcomen rapped at his door.

" I'm off," he said; " a despatch has just reached me and my leave's curtailed. I'm to join my 'destroyer' immediately, from Salerno, bring her up to Naples to coal and then go to the fleet at Palermo. There's a Royalty on the way to Sicily it seems and we are to be there in force."

" I'm awfully sorry." Derrick's face shewed his regret.

" So am I," said the other heartily, " but I tell you what I can do. We're bound to be in Naples half to-morrow, and I'll hunt up Mrs. Clifton's maid there and set her mind at rest regarding her mistress."

" By Jove! that would be splendid."

" I suppose—" the other hesitated a moment. " You'd better tell me exactly what I am to say."

Derrick knit his brows. " It's not easy, is it?" He paused a moment, thinking it out. " Leave me out of it altogether," he said, " and simply say that Mrs. Clifton is with English friends." He counted over some notes and handed them across: " Give her these, will you? she may be short of cash and tell her that as soon as ever the line's repaired Mrs. Clifton will send for her, but that it can't be managed yet."

Newcomen's honest face cleared.

" All right," he said, " I think you can leave it to me. Parker's Hotel, isn't it? and the name's Susan"—he made a note on his cuff—" Susan what?" he asked.

They looked blankly at each other.

"Lord only knows!" laughed Derrick.

"Mrs. Clifton's maid, that's good enough anyhow. I'll drop you a line to-morrow night. How's the patient this morning?"

"She's had a better night and her temperature's down, but she's still off her head. The doctor's pleased though, he's just gone."

"I hope she's a bit better, and now, good-bye."

The two men shook hands gravely, their minds with the right-haired girl in the room beyond with whom they had so curiously tangled their paths. Some instinct prompted Derrick.

"Come and look at her," he said, "step softly though she may be asleep. I know she'd have liked to have wished you good-bye."

The windows were wide open and the clear light fell on the bed illuminating the girl's pale face, the long lashes closed over the shadowy eyes, and her hair in tangled masses of copper outspread upon the pillow. One little hand hung limply down over the edge of the bed and the sunshine played on her wedding ring.

"Poor little woman," said the sailor softly. "Take care of her!" His eyes met Derrick's in a straight glance. "Good-bye," he repeated, "I'll write to Naples," and was gone.

But he carried the picture of that sweet white face with him over many a mile of sea.

And that very afternoon Candida awoke to consciousness, weak and frail indeed, but her own natural self.

Derrick had been out for a short walk whilst Rosina took his place and had brought back with him a big bough of blossom, plucked ruthlessly but honestly paid for, from a distant orchard.

He was trying now to stand it in the jug so that the girl's eyes might fall on it, the first thing when she opened them to life, knowing full well her joy in beautiful things.

Twice he had propped up the top-heavy branches and each time, just as he judged them balanced, they had fallen forward and struck him on the nose.

This was the third venture, equally grotesque in its result.

"Damn!" The word broke from his lips in desperation, and suddenly behind him he caught a faint laugh.

He wheeled round like a shot, letting the bough fall anyhow.

Candida's eyes were open, no longer blank or shining with fever, but full of comprehension, and a smile twitched the corners of her mouth.

He was by her side in a moment.

"Candida," he whispered, "oh, my dear, I'm so glad!"

"But where am I?" Her eyes wandered round the sunny room, lingered on the blossom and came back again to the flushed handsome face of the man.

"What has happened?"

He noticed the extreme weakness of her voice and going to the mantelpiece poured her out some medicine.

"Drink this first," he said, "just to please your Nurse Martha, and then you shall have everything." He propped up the pillows behind her and held the glass to her lips.

She obeyed him mechanically and sank back with a little sigh.

"Is it a dream?" she said; "anyhow it's very

nice after the nightmare I've been through . . . I feel so sleepy," she put her hand up to her eyes, "but the light hurts——"

He went to the window, and pulled to the outside shutters, then stole back to her side.

"Thank you!" she said drowsily; her eyes closed, but she stretched out her little hand and he took it in his own.

"Good-night," she whispered like a tired child and in a few minutes he could tell by her quiet breathing she was asleep.

So he sat by her bedside, as the long day deepened into twilight, not daring to move, cramped but happy, with the soft fingers in his own.

And at last even they relaxed, as she lay without moving under the healing spell of sleep.

The doctor came at six, noiselessly, and beamed upon the pair.

"The wife is doing well—it could not be better—let her sleep it out, but when she wakes, hot soup and no talk. We must feed her now. Courage, my friend; it is a great step forward." His black eyes raked the young man's face sympathetically. "You are but lately married—non è vero?"

Derrick stammered incoherently. "One sees that," said the kindly doctor, as they walked down the corridor together. "Ahi!" he shrugged his shoulders. "It is a fine thing—youth—é l'amore!"

But next morning came the dreaded explanations.

Candida, wide-eyed and fretful with the first touch of returning health, insisted on the whole truth, and Derrick, in his anxiety not to upset the patient and his dread of a scene, succeeded in painting himself in the worst possible light.

"I quite understand Susan was out of the

question," Candida conceded, "but you might have got me a nurse—one of the little 'blue sisters'—they're always available."

The hot tears rose to her eyes.

"And now it's more deceit again, worse lies, and—and a perfectly intolerable situation!"

She turned away from him, burying her flushed face in the pillows.

"I couldn't bear the thought of one of those long black religious things," he pleaded; "one could tell you had gone through so much horror already—you talked, you know, about it, and I thought it would frighten you to death to wake and see a perambulating coffin like that beside you."

But Candida refused to smile. She felt weak and deeply ill-used.

She gave him a quick glance from under her long lashes.

"So I talked in my sleep, did I?—and you sat there and listened. How very pleasant!"

The tips of her ears grew red at the thought and Derrick, wounded to the quick, moved across to the open window. She should not see how much she had hurt him.

And at that moment the doctor appeared on the scene.

"Eh, buon giorno, Signore, and the patient? Ma! this is eccellentissimo!" He felt her pulse and his black eyes gleamed with pleasure as he turned towards Derrick.

"My compliments! She will do your careful nursing credit."

He sat down by the bedside and began to question her.

There were no aches or pains? and the head? etc.

She answered him with evident shyness which he put down to her inferior command of the language, but whenever he mentioned "her husband" she stiffened involuntarily.

He glanced at the tall figure gazing out of the window and his old eyes twinkled.

"A tiff," he thought, but wise in his generation pretended he noticed nothing.

So, business over, he chatted on pleasantly, trying in his kindly way to thaw the chilled atmosphere.

About the eruption, of his one visit to England and, fatal step had he but known it to question the pair about their life in the grey country beyond.

"And there are no babies?"—Candida crimsoned to the brows.

"Patienza!" he cried cheerily, "the day is yet young!" and Derrick felt an insane desire to take him by the throat and drop him into the garden below.

But after this bombshell in the camp he rose to depart.

"Until to-morrow then, a riverderlà Signora; the medicine still, and eat, eat, eat. Again I compliment the nurse," and he bustled off, pleased with his rôle of peacemaker. The door closed on a pregnant silence.

Derrick drummed on the shutters with his knuckles, staring out over the still dust-laden land, conscious of a bitter feeling of failure, and totally uncertain how to act.

But after a little a chilling voice came from the bed.

"Would you be so good as to ring for the chambermaid? I want her."

The last words faltered and without looking at the

girl he walked across to the fireplace and rang the bell; then he turned, and passing into the adjoining room, gently closed the door between, for the first time—had she but known it—during the long hours of anxiety; and to himself, he said,

“It is over!”

Rosina bustled in, brisk and cheerful, overjoyed to find “la bella Signora” was once more herself.

As she stirred about the room, getting hot water and obeying the invalid’s little commands, she prattled on without ceasing.

“And the Signore? He was resting,” she hoped. “He must be worn-out—Madonna! what devotion! All those nights, without a wink of sleep, and in the day too, he would never rest. He must have the strength of a giant. Poverino! it is now he will feel the strain!” and so on.

A wave of shame swept across the listening girl. She had thought only of herself, never of him. She had rewarded his devotion with angry words, as she felt bitterly—and for what?

For acting as he believed was best, to shield her good name from the breath of scandal.

Slowly the depths of her ingratitude overwhelmed her, and she choked over the soup that Rosina insisted on her swallowing.

At last the good creature left the room and with a sigh of relief she could let the tears flow unchecked—tears of remorse and sheer physical weakness.

Once she thought she heard a stir in the room next door.

“Derrick,” she called softly, holding her breath to listen, above the beating of her heart.

But there came no response.

For the truth was the man was dead asleep.

He had thrown himself on his bed, worn-out with his long vigil, sad at heart, and sleep, the deep sleep of exhaustion had claimed him as her own.

At six he woke with a start and the guilty feeling of the medicine-hour neglected.

Still drowsy and half-forgetful of the trouble between them he stole in on stocking feet to take a peep at his patient.

But Candida was awake and the sight of the big man's care for her, the noiseless tread and tired anxious face went to her very heart.

"Derrick," she cried, "I'm so sorry—" she gave a little sob—"what must you think? I want to thank you—to thank you for all——" the words failed her.

He stooped down, worried at the sight of her tears and gently stroked back the thick soft hair that tumbled over her brow.

"Hush, hush," he said, "you mustn't excite yourself—it's alright—I understand."

She put up her arms impulsively and drawing his head down to hers, out of the fulness of her heart, she kissed him.

Then, with a little shamed cry she pushed him away.

Still with the new-born feeling of reverence he held himself well in hand. But the hurt was gone for ever and he knew that for all her sudden show of temper, she was but dearer to him than before.

"Darling," he whispered softly, "I am indeed thanked," and the happiness rang in his voice.

He poured out her medicine and held it towards her.

"Will you drink this and try to sleep, just to please your Nurse Martha?"

She smiled back at him sweetly through her tears.

"Dear Nurse Martha," she said, "there's only one thing wanting now, and that's the yellow dog, to sit up and beg for philosophy."

CHAPTER XI

Derrick leaned over the edge of the terrace fringing the Santa Caterina Hotel, that little inn perched on the sharp point of headland at the entrance to Amalfi, like an outpost guarding the grey roofs and deep blue bay beyond.

His thoughts were bitter indeed; for to-morrow he and Candida would part.

She had made a rapid recovery from her sharp attack of fever and they had left Sorrento, driving along the beautiful Corniche road to their present halting-place, which Newcomen had recommended to Derrick in one of their last talks together.

And to-morrow Candida would continue her journey alone; at Cava dei Terreni Susan would join her mistress by the newly-mended line; as she had come so she would pass out of his life for ever!

Derrick, under the gold moonlight, unconsciously ground his heel into the unevenly-paved terrace.

In his heart was dull anger as well as pain; the wounded vanity of the man and the reaction from the tight control he had laid on himself during the long hours of anxiety.

He knew she was fond of him—she shewed it unconsciously a dozen times a day, but her "love of

convention," as he called it bitterly, built up an impassable barrier between them.

Not all his logic, passionate protest, nor all his hot desire could break it down.

Only that afternoon, watching the sun dip down over the blue water, as they sat on the terrace side by side, they had gone over the old ground again: re-opened the subject of his stormy speech on the shore at Capri and he had pleaded with her manfully, desperately, but in vain.

She was true to her own fixed principles, to the heights of her girlish ideals.

He cursed at the narrowness of her outlook on life, at the bigoted Scotch upbringing, at the "coldness of her temperament!"

But Candida with wet eyes and an aching heart clung to her colours. She would not be coerced.

She was Geoffrey Clifton's wife, bound to him by laws of honour and obedience.

Too honest to profess a love that she did not feel she yet clung to the two remaining clauses of her marriage-vow.

She had met all his logic, all the clever props with which he bolstered his modern views, with the simple unswerving response,

"It would not be right."

They had dined together in a moody silence, and afterwards she had gone early to bed, pleading fatigue, with a last look of piteous protest at the man she loved.

He could see her sad face now as he stared out through the darkness, the blue eyes clouded, the red mouth quivering as she faltered a low "good-night."

And he had not even answered her. So it had come to this!

He stood there, in the deep silence of the hour, broken ever so faintly by the wash of the distant sea where the thin line of white against the beach came into sight and vanished again as the moon dipped under the edge of a cloud and the face of the night darkened.

Sleep was impossible. He could not face the long restless hours he knew so well awaited him. It was better to stand there in the cool air and think.

But he tried to turn his mind in another direction, to flee the love that threatened nothing but parting and pain.

Since he had resigned his post as secretary to Dirke, politics had been relegated to a far-away memory.

Now he must face the future squarely and the step he had so long contemplated—that of entering the lists himself and championing the cause he had studied so steadily at the next likely parliamentary election.

In his innermost heart he did not feel sure of Dirke. Now that their paths were definitely sundered, he wondered how the busy man would regard his secretary's bid for individual power.

He had never been able to gauge the cold leader's feelings for him and the mere fact of his intrigue with Lady Mary had created an atmosphere of silent antagonism, at any rate on the younger man's part.

There had been such wheels within wheels in the political house, love and ambition playing each other for steadily growing stakes.

And it seemed to Derrick at times as if Dirke had looked on from afar, knowing all things under that mocking smile of his, even cynically amused at the

tie that bound the clever young secretary to the everlasting daily round.

And now, in his new, hardly gained freedom, was it to be peace or war?

He turned, his arms folded, thinking deeply and paced up the empty terrace, with its row of fast-closed shutters.

And suddenly with a clatter and rush the farthest window before him was thrown wide open and out came Candida, her dressing-gown swirling on the wind as she turned in haste and pulling the door to violently, peered back into the empty room, her face pressed to the glass.

Away went politics, ambition and the like as Derrick strode forward, amazed at the strangeness of her conduct.

"Candida," he cried aloud, "whatever's the matter?"

She started with a quick backward glance and turned her frightened face towards him.

"I can't help it!" she said desperately. "It's—it's a mouse!"

He threw his head back and laughed. What a child it was! But she gave a sharp exclamation of anger.

"I can't help it," she repeated hotly again. "I hate the sight of one. All these hours it's been there, nibble, nibble, nibble—squeak, squeak." Her voice rose in its excitement and he choked back a smile at the sight of her real distress, "and then," she threw out her arm dramatically, "it ran right across my bed—I *felt* it!"

She shuddered, her eyes back on the dark room; Derrick, the quarrel, everything forgotten in the panic of the moment.

The cold night wind brushed past her, tossing the

long curls that hung around her face and sweeping out the folds of her gown.

Derrick gave a quick exclamation. "Oh, Candida—how naughty!—with nothing on your feet."

He was the nurse once more by simple association of ideas.

"You must go in at once or you'll be ill again to-morrow."

"But the mouse?" she faltered.

"Oh, hang the mouse! I'll come in and kill it for you."

He opened the window as he spoke and his voice grew stern.

"You *must* go in," he ordered her; "it's sheer folly after your illness."

She gave a little shiver and gathering her dressing-gown with both hands tightly round her knees, stepped over the threshold.

There was a sofa by the window and she sat down hastily, tucking her bare feet under her, with a mistrustful glance along the floor.

"I know it's cowardly," she explained, "but I simply can't help it. I stood it for hours, hearing it patter about and squeak, but when it got on the bed——" words failed her for a moment.

"I wonder where it is now—I wish the moon would come out from behind that cloud!"

"It's gone down its hole ages ago, I expect," Derrick smiled, "and is probably far more frightened even than you."

"Oh, I am sure it hasn't," said Candida nervously, "if you'll just sit down and keep quiet a little you'll hear it."

He obeyed her silently, settling himself on the foot of the sofa by the little curled-up figure of the girl.

She held her breath and waited. In the intense silence he could count the beating of his heart, and some faint perfume from her hair or the folds of her wrap stole up to his senses.

Suddenly she leaned forward and clutched him by the arm.

"There," she whispered, "did you hear it? Now!"

She was so near to him in the darkness, he could feel her breath upon his cheek and the soft tendrils of her disordered hair brushed slightly against his ear.

Something rose in his throat, suffocating him, and the dim room swam before his eyes as he set his teeth in his effort to master the strong desire he felt to crush her in his arms.

A faint rustling sound came from the distant grate.

In the urgent need for action, he groped for a book on the table by him and hurled it across the room in the direction of the noise as the moon emerging from its cloud flooded the scene with light.

Distinctly, in the sudden whiteness, they saw a small brown body dash across the floor and force its way under the badly fitting door.

"Thank Heaven," said Candida fervently, "it's gone!" She gave a deep sigh of relief, but Derrick did not speak.

His eyes were fixed on the girl's face, drinking its beauty deep down into his memory, devouring its every detail, even to the traces of recent tears which in the cold white light stood confessed around her eyes.

She could feel his masterful gaze compelling hers. She struggled to resist, but a strange powerlessness was creeping over her; she was falling under the spell of the sheer force of his manhood.

She put her hand up with a little fluttering movement to her throat and his arm crept round her as she stared back helplessly into the deep brown eyes.

But at his touch a sudden thrill of excitement swept across her, and the flood-gates of her long pent-up love were opened, drowning thought and reason, stifling the words that rose to her lips as she swayed unconsciously towards him and he gathered her up in his arms with a little cry, all the warm soft beauty of her in the exquisite joy of the moment.

He rose to his feet and carried her across the room, her head on his shoulder, as once before, half fainting, he had borne her up the steep garden of the Sorrento Hotel, and laid her on the bed; and the words broke from him incoherently,

"I love you so!" and again, "I love you so—oh, Candida, my darling——"

And the clouds veiled the pearly west and the moon went down her lonely pathway over the distant sea.

But the gentle Night smiled softly as she wrapped the house on the cliff's steep side in the folds of her darkest hood, for as the breeze swept past her feet she had caught the rustle of young Love's wings.

In the morning when Candida awoke she found two letters on her breakfast tray.

Half dazed by the brightness of the sunshine without she tore open the uppermost.

It was a pathetic epistle from Susan at Naples: the carefully pointed hand, full of misspellings breathing forth a genuine despair at her inability to

meet her mistress at Cava that day. She had slipped on the treacherous ashes that still choked the thoroughfares and sprained her ankle, and the doctor refused his permission for her to put her foot to the ground.

"A respite . . . !" Through Candida's drowsy brain the thought flashed suddenly and mechanically she turned to the other letter, memory fast returning.

It was a poem from Derrick.

"Into the dust of Dreamland
Silvered by Moons of Love
Hand in hand let us lose our way
Far from the heights above.
Heights of Logic and Order,
Swept bare by the winds of the Law
For the feet of the wise, with their sad cold eyes
And merciless silent jaw.

"Down in the shade of the myrtles,
The nightingale sings to her mate
Of Love and of Life and the promise of Birth—
That lies hid in the deep lap of Fate—
Up on the heights they may talk of Fame,
Grim Duty, and sad-faced Death,
One glance from thine eyes and I swoop from grey skies
To the glow of thine arms and thy breath.

"One kiss—and for both, Belovéd,
The dust shall be sparks of fire!
Why pause to think, with all life to drink
In the flood of our deep desire?—
Leave Logic and Law and Reason
To reign on the heights above
And come down to my kingdom of Dreamland
In the silver-dust Valley of Love."

"The silver-dust valley of love . . ." It was true then, and no dream!

With a sudden incontrollable impulse, half-wonder, half-fear, Candida sprang out of bed and crossing the room caught up the little silver hand-glass and gazed long and earnestly into its clear reflection.

It was the same face confronting her; the same honest blue eyes that looked so steadily back into her own, the same firm young mouth with its clean-cut innocent curves.

And yet——

She was Derrick's mistress. She did not spare herself—it was the naked truth.

But with the very thought, as she stood there, the chestnut curls running riot over her slender shoulders, there came such a haunting memory of the pleading passionate voice and the kisses he had rained upon her through the night, that repentance was swept aside and shame drowned in the very depths of her first great realisation of the mystery of love.

She had been false to her creed of life. She had torn down her girlish ideas and trampled them under foot, and—strange bewitchment of Mother Nature—all she felt was the glow of the morning and the longing for a sight of her lover's happy face.

Of all the words he had spoken, all the arguments he had used in that . . . century-ago scene in Capri, one phrase stood out defiantly confuted.

Love had *not* "passed her by!" He had claimed her triumphantly in all the glow and splendour of her youth. So casting all shame aside, drunk with love, she dressed quickly and went out, down the long path, where the blossoming almond met and kissed against the radiant sky. to her lover in the garden.

All the anxiety he had suffered—wondering how in the morning light she would view the world from her new, strange standpoint—was swept away by the sight of her happy face.

And as he caught her in his arms with a little

inarticulate cry of relief she answered his unspoken thought with the simplicity of a child.

"Oh! Derry dear," she whispered, as her hands stole round his neck, "It's all so sweet . . . love in the sunshine—I can't believe it's wrong!"

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PART II
TANGLED PATHS

CHAPTER XII

The hansom swerved smoothly round into the Mall as Derrick, his luggage piled above him, gazed out at the growing improvement in the Queen's Memorial work, breathing in deeply the smell of London, that individual blending of odours that is the privilege of every great city.

After his experience with the Jehus of the Neapolitan coast, it was a joy to watch the steady flow of traffic and the neat way they blended into the scheme as his hansom turned up through the gates into St. James'.

At the top of the hill there was the usual pause, and he recognised a club acquaintance, elderly but dandified, dawdling before Stewart's to greet a pretty woman muffled in sables—for the weather was still chilly in England—who had approached from the Bond Street end.

The pair after shaking hands turned to the right along Piccadilly, side by side.

Derrick could just catch through the glass her delicate profile raised towards her companion and the smooth coils of her perfectly dressed hair.

He gave a little start. It was Lady Mary Dirke.

He watched them move on together until they came abreast of Solomon's, and the lady's almost

imperceptible pause before the flower-clad window; then saw the quick shake of her head as her escort with senile generosity persisted—the subsequent hesitation and then, as his hansom, obedient to the policeman's nod, carried him quickly forward, he caught a parting glimpse of her sables vanishing through the doorway of the flower-shop.

He leaned back comfortably and laughed aloud. It was the same old London; with its smiling intrigue, its easy vice and prosperous virtue!

As he reached his club, a member passing in before him flung his half-smoked cigarette down into the gutter, to be pounced on immediately by a prowling sandwich man.

The fellow raised himself erect, straightening his notice-board and as Derrick's eyes fell on the advertisement, he noticed it ran:

"Once you have smoked our 'PERFECT PUFF' you will pass all others in disgust."

Above it, cynically unconscious, the unkempt, bleary-eyed sandwich man blew out a thin column of smoke, obviously American!

It was the touch of humour completing the picture as the Irishman sprang from his cab.

That, and the porter's discreet welcome, the pile of letters awaiting him and a voice from the hall that hailed him with a yawn.

"Hullo, Kilmarny, you back?"

It was London—voilà tout. He was in his own again.

He splashed about in all the luxury of an English bath-room and dressed leisurely.

He was to dine with the Dirkes. Half-way through his shave a mischievous thought struck him.

She would be wearing her favourite Malmaisons to-night and he would tease her over her elderly

admirer; but by suggestion only, so that Julian should not understand.

They had played the game so often; he would see if she had forgotten or if the new Religion forbade the sport.

His tie went wrong but nothing could mar the exuberance of his spirits.

"Dash it all! You're such a savage now, Derry," he told his brown reflection in the glass, "you've forgotten the way to dress!"

And his face grew suddenly tender as the train of thoughts carried him back to a less-assured civilisation and swerved to his little "sun-worshipper," alone in distant Amalfi.

He opened the window, half-stifled by the used-up heaviness of the London air and lighting a cigarette, threw himself back in a chair.

Below, the steady note of the traffic rose to his ears but his mind was far away, back in the sunshine.

It had been a wonderful idyll—the whole series of well-nigh impossible events—more than ever wild as viewed in the grey London light.

What a dear little woman it was!—sweet, passionate, unsophisticated. He gave a sudden sigh, for the parting had been hard and only two nights ago he had held her in his arms on the lonely terrace, wrapped round by the warm Italian night, and sworn he would return.

But now his work claimed him. He had idled long enough. He remembered the first call to harness; the letter Dirke had sent him over a week ago, giving the definite proof he had begged of his undiminished interest in his late secretary.

There was the chance of a vacant seat at Treyborough in the adjoining county to his own.

The present member, an elderly man, had suffered

a slight stroke and might retire from political life at any moment.

It would be well for Derrick to return and hold himself in readiness for the emergency.

Sir George's influence in the neighbourhood should be worked for its full value and the seat, if gained, would be a noteworthy victory for the party.

So Julian wrote with a touch of rare enthusiasm but Derrick, deaf to the old war cry, had lingered on, lost in the glamour of his Southern romance—love in the sunshine.

Then the two telegrams, Dirke-like and definite.

He must decide at once and return to town.

Even Candida, sad at heart, counselled departure.

So here he was, back again, already eager for the fray.

But he loved her still. As well as ever, he told himself with a certain complacency.

He looked at his watch; there would be time to write her a line announcing his safe arrival, so he went down to the smoking-room and began.

"Darling little woman——"

But a knot of men round the fireplace hailed him with delight.

"By Jove—you're brown! Where have you been all this while? Lucky dog! London simply beastly—nothing but rain or fogs. Oh—rotten, of course—can't get any exercise now the shooting's over. Golf?—bless you, man, the country's under water—floods everywhere—a damned climate!" Derrick slipped the letter into his pocket and resigned himself—not altogether unwillingly—to the inevitable.

At eight he tore himself away—the letter still unwritten—and was whirled in a fast taxi to the well-known door.

Lady Mary greeted him calmly without a flicker of emotion on her pale beautiful face; Julian with cold courtesy. Derrick noticed though, with his keen eye for effect, that his hostess was dressed in his favourite pink, an indefinite shell-coloured tea-gown with loose flowing lines that hid her too slender figure and yet was cut frankly low, showing the clearly-veined white neck, and where the rich lace veiled the soft outlines of her breast, a knot of carnations was carelessly fastened.

His eyes twinkled involuntarily.

"What lovely flowers!" His voice already had caught the London note. "It's early for Malmaisons, isn't it?"

She touched the petals delicately with slim white fingers and Julian dropped his sombre eyes and gazed down at them where he stood, leaning against the high carved mantelpiece beside his wife.

"It is rather. Lena brought them up from the country;" her voice, low and almost throaty, was perfectly composed; "they have started a lot of glass and are rather proud of their flowers—I tell her she will be developing into one of those dreadful women who wear 'garden-hats' and wear in gauntlet gloves and whose talk consists of 'bulbs' and 'cuttings.'"

She laughed lazily in the full enjoyment of the lie.

So "religion" had not cured her of one besetting sin!

"I saw some at Solomon's as I passed and thought of you," said Derrick mischievously.

The butler announced dinner and they went downstairs. There were to be no other guests that evening.

"Quite like old times," said Lady Mary pleas-

antly as they entered the long picturesque dining-room.

Derrick darted a swift glance sideways but the almond-shaped eyes were veiled by their heavy lids.

Meanwhile he gave himself up whole-heartedly to the enjoyment of the moment—the delicate shaded lights, fairy-like flowers and all the refinements of the exquisitely served meal.

The rough linen and coarse glass of Amalfi with the steaming dishes of macaroni and badly carved meat seemed by contrast like a nightmare of the past.

This was his natural environment, not the other.

Julian consulted him about the wine. He was trying a different brand of champagne, too dry for Lady Mary by far, but what did Kilmarney think of it for an ordinary dinner-wine?

"Don't ask me," said Derrick laughingly, "I'm a regular savage now, with a thoroughly depraved palate! You forget I am only just back from the husks and no judge as yet of the merits of fatted calf!"

"And how did you like them?—the husks, I mean?" Lady Mary smiled at him with narrowing eyes. "What a remarkably healthy-looking prodigal you make!"

He moved a little uncomfortably under her gaze and finished his glass before replying.

"Oh—everything is good in the sunshine."

He was not to be "drawn" so easily.

"Except, perhaps, an eruption—that wasn't so pleasant," he added.

"Oh! you were in for that?" Julian looked up with a quick glance of interest and Derrick, glad to have steered his barque into smoother water, launched forth into description, in which, needless

to say, Candida played no part.

"Have you seen anything of Shotover?" queried his host. "He's down there somewhere with his yacht—science mad as ever, with a new theory of his own on earthquakes."

"And the quaintest party on board you ever heard of," Lady Mary broke in. "His sister Judith to play hostess—so Erikson's there, of course! and who do you think?—you'd never guess! Lady Strachan and the Market Harboro' man. They talk 'horses' all day long and she wrote to Di Morland and called him 'her affinity'!" the tears of mirth were in her eyes as Derrick roared with laughter. "Then they've got that Christian Scientist woman, Milsom I think the name is, with her rheumatic old husband and a girl who's taking a 'rest-cure' and stays in her cabin all day; two or three scientific elderlies for Shotover and my poor little cousin, who keeps me posted and, thank Heaven, one respectable man for her—some Squire's son from Cheshire. I am hoping she will marry him out of sheer desperation!"

"Is that Kitty Chesney?"

"No—the eldest girl, Dora—you saw her at that bazaar last year. After all, perhaps she might do worse. She's been out a good many seasons and he has plenty of money and seems a kind, stupid creature. Her letter is most amusing. She says they watched a sunset the other evening together—one of those gorgeous southern displays that have been noticed since the eruption and after the last pink cloud had faded away over Naples he made his one remark: 'I think we're much too near land—I understand the smells in the harbour are most unhealthy!' There's poetry for you," she laughed, "but the sort of man who makes a first-class husband."

"Is there such a creature?" said Julian with his slight sneer. "I doubt it! Second-class perhaps, not first—that perished at the flood."

"Driving us to the Jews," said his wife quickly and he smiled at the thrust.

"Money . . . money, money!" He shrugged his shoulders and turned to his late secretary.

"The usual impasse over the bills, Kilmarny; Money! I believe Mary eats it," but his voice was not very serious.

She threw out her hands, her rings flashing as she shewed their transparency against the shaded candles.

"You can't say I grow fat on it," she retorted.

Julian laughed. "You shall have it," he said, "if I have to rob the government."

"Or give up bridge?" She turned to Derrick. "He's gone quite mad on the game—in its old age too, just as most people have got tired of it. Every evening now I am deserted for this new love."

Julian smiled slowly.

"Am I the only one to seek a new excitement?"

It was the first allusion Derrick had caught to her change of religion and he looked at his beautiful hostess a little curiously but she was occupied with a bracelet that had come unfastened.

"May I?" said Derrick. He leaned forward, re-clasped it neatly and his fingers, browned by the southern sun, touched the smooth whiteness of her arm. She raised her heavy eyelids and gave him a quick glance of inquiry.

It was all over in a second and he leaned back in his chair thoughtfully. What an odd trait of human nature it was that now he felt himself no longer "bound to the car" he could once more realise her undeniable fascination.

After dessert she left the two men together and their talk drifted immediately into work; Dirke expounding his latest views and filling the gap of past political events for the wanderer, holding out the promise of a keen contest in the North.

Derrick, fresh from a healthy idleness, threw himself into the plans with ardour.

It was past ten o'clock when they rose from the table.

In the hall the host reached up for his hat and coat.

"I'm going out," he said, "no need to treat you as a visitor, is there?" he spoke with an unaccustomed warmth in his voice that pleased Derrick strangely—the old glamour of his boyhood summed up in the magic name—"Julian Dirke"!

"You go up to Mary," he gave the younger man a look, half-humorous, half-sour, "you'll find her in the boudoir, I expect. Religion's all very well——" his lip curled slowly as he left the phrase unfinished.

"Don't forget Tuesday's lunch, two o'clock, St. Stephen's; Braine and Sir Gilbert Osram are coming—good-night," and with one of his quick movements he was gone.

Derrick walked upstairs, half-vexed with himself at the touch of excitement that stirred his blood.

The faint notes of music floated down to him and his feet quickened to the air as they took the well-known path to the cosy little room.

In the doorway under the looped-up tapestry he paused but she went on playing as if unaware of his presence.

He could just see her dark head outlined against a Venetian vase full of tall white lilies and he caught the old accustomed scent of the pot-pourri in the big bowl by the chintz-covered sofa.

It seemed like a dream within a dream, so present and yet so dimly past.

Suddenly she stopped playing with a low ripple of laughter.

"Why Derry," she cried, "don't you know your way in by now?"

She leaned forward, her fingers still caressing the notes, the pearly white of her throat accentuated by the darkness of the piano, her narrow eyes alight, mocking his indecision and the heavy-headed pink carnations rose and fell with her breath.

"That was never the difficulty," he laughed lightly back, but against his will a note of feeling crept into his deep voice. "It was the way out that was so hard, Mary."

CHAPTER XIII

Half-way up the Mill Valley Candida sat down on a rock to rest.

The heat was stifling. The high mountains on either side of the deep ravine seemed to cut off for ever the chance of a passing breeze and the picturesque piled rocks above her beat back the rays of the mid-day sun in a scintillating haze.

It was nearly two weeks now since Derrick had been called back to work but she could not tear herself away from Amalfi, where every bend of the winding road, each clump of cactus and aloe and the very olive trees on the dusty slopes of the hill recalled a speech or a glance of the man she loved.

Before the arrival of Susan, for prudence sake she had moved into the high Cappucini Hotel pre-texting the advent of friends to the owners of the quiet Santa Caterina; and there the old servant, carried up the steep ascent, had joined her, to remain virtually a prisoner in the monastic precincts, grumbling at the sprained ankle that still hampered her movements, but glad to be in the quiet country after her Neapolitan experiences.

So Candida could still wander alone to her heart's content and live through again the wonder-

ful weeks that were past, writing long letters to Derrick and looking forward to the joy of his promised return.

And, for the most part, she was happy. She was too strong a character to indulge in weak regrets, once the excitement was passed, and although there were still times when the old scruples obtruded themselves, she put them resolutely aside, or examining them from her lover's point of view, laid them up against the score of the lonely days behind her.

She was taking her revenge on Fate for her unloved childhood and barren married life.

That was the only thing that really troubled her—her attitude towards her husband.

Had Derrick but hinted at the advisability of a rupture she would have willingly assented.

She did not love Geoffrey Clifton; more than ever now, she did not wish to live with him—even on the old unnatural terms!

But Derrick under the banner of "Freedom" resented all tendency towards responsibility.

And there was no other cause open to her, for although she had money of her own, she could find no sound excuse for demanding a separation from the dreary student at home; and beyond all this rose her consideration for her lover's future.

He could not afford to dim his name by the merest breath of scandal.

His political enemies must find no flaw in his armour of social suitability.

He had plainly told her so; trusting to her good sense to realise the necessity and be content to remain a hidden quantity in his scheme of existence.

Luckily for her, in her unworldliness she did not realise the unfairness of the bargain and her sense

of humour was not stirred by the economy of an arrangement which would have struck an average Scotsman dumb with admiration.

She gave all and demanded nothing in return, blinded by love, in the young sweetness of her generous soul.

So her love for him was but strengthened by the added element of responsibility in his career and she stifled the ever-recurring impulse to bid him return in her daily letters that brought her hurried irregular replies full of work and the stress of London life.

But to-day as she sat there in the valley, tired and lonely, a sudden wave of re-action set in.

For five days she had had no news; and it seemed almost as though she had made her supreme sacrifice for nothing, ruthlessly overturning the altars of her faith and risking honour and self-respect, to become a mere romantic "episode" in the life of the man.

She watched the waters foaming out through one of the paper-mills below, with the steady hum of the turning wheel, and her thoughts were tinged with bitterness.

For the moment she would have given all she possessed to blot out the month that was past and go back to the Candida of the happy Capri days, to the Garden of Eden, before she had been tempted to taste of the fruit of the tree.

The sun beat down upon her in the narrow rock-bound valley and she felt sick and faint.

With an effort she rose to her feet and struggled on up the roughly-paved path by the rushing stream.

As she turned the bend the scene swam before her eyes and she leaned for a moment against an olive-bough to steady herself.

This was horrible—she was going to faint!

She looked ahead desperately and caught sight of a cottage hidden behind a knot of cork-trees that made a welcome patch of green in the steady glare.

Tottering on, her hands clenched, her eyes fixed firmly ahead, she forced her way by sheer will upward and at length reached the threshold.

Inside a motherly-looking woman was busy spinning at her wheel and Candida gasped out a faltering request for water.

The peasant, surprised at the sudden apparition, rose to her feet, just in time to put her arm round the fainting girl and lead her to the settle.

Candida's first impression when thought and memory returned, was of cool shade and comfort as a kind Italian voice begged "the Signora to drink" and a glass was placed to her lips.

"It is good wine, the wine of the country; my Beppo gets it from the podere above—at Ravello; it will do no harm."

Obediently she took a gulp at the raw beverage and with a little shudder, gazed about her.

She caught the woman's anxious eyes and nodded her head.

"Grazia molto—I am better now."

The peasant smiled. "It is without doubt the sun; no one but a 'forestiero' would walk abroad during the mid-day heat." She shook her dark head wisely, standing before the girl, her hands on her finely proportioned hips. "We of the South know better. We come in and draw the shutters to—see, there is no one in all the Valle di Molini."

She waved her hand towards the vine-wreathed porch where under the low pergola one could catch a glimpse of the narrow ravine, down to the distant

deep blue sea, and Candida sat up wearily on the wooden settle, leaning her head back against the worn angle.

She dreaded the long walk home through the glare again and said so, simply.

The peasant threw up her hands.

"Ma! it was not to be heard of! Until the mill clock struck three the Signora must rest indoors, gather her forces," as she put it quaintly, "for the homeward journey."

Candida, with a sigh of relief, removed her hat, pinning back the ruffled masses of her beautiful hair.

"Che bello!" the woman looked at her with open admiration, "one would say a saint down in San Andrea yonder."

She drew the spindle towards her as she spoke and encouraged by her visitor's smile began to question her with simple curiosity.

Ahi! she was at the Cappucini—it was the hotel of the English—the Signora from England? One could see that by her fair skin and eyes of blue.

Her speech, confusing with its touches of Neapolitan, flowed on smoothly and mingled with the soothing hum of the wheel.

In the dimness of the shuttered room as she bent over her shuttle, with the purple shadows in her glossy black hair and the gay kerchief pinned across her full bosom she made a picture worth studying and Candida settled herself back as comfortably as the hard seat would allow and gave herself up to a drowsy peacefulness.

Suddenly the faint cry of a child came from the room beyond and the woman, with a smile, pushed the wheel aside.

"E la bambina," she explained to Candida and vanishing in the further gloom, returned with the quaint little creature in her arms, its pink face querulous within its frilled cap, its small body tightly swathed in the Southern fashion with fold upon fold against the firm pillow.

She unpinned her bright kerchief and settling herself on a low stool almost at Candida's feet proceeded to nurse her child with the easy unconsciousness of a creature of nature.

They were two women together. What need then for apology?

And as she pressed the little form lovingly to her bosom she gazed up in her visitor's face and talked.

Was the Signora married? Five years!—who would have thought it?—one would have said a Signorina, davvero—and the babies then? None! Madonna mia—what a sorrow for both!

She settled the child more comfortably upon her knee and continued.

There was a shrine now, not so far from Cava, which had great miraculous power.

Stefanina, the wife of Antonielli the fisherman, had gone there but the summer before and her wish had been granted by the Virgin—almost at once—a fine boy—it had cost her, in all, nine candles. . .

She looked up shrewdly into Candida's face.

"The Signora is so young—a little patience—chi lo sa?—it might be even now the little one knocking at the gates of her heart."

A sudden horror filled the girl.

Oh no—era impossibile! She thrust the thought away, but the peasant only smiled, bending over her healthy child.

Maternity was right—was as the good God planned—it held no terrors for her.

And slowly it dawned on Candida, as she sat there in all the open poverty of the humble cottage, that this was the life that nature blessed and not that other, made by society.

This fertile, peaceful existence where the man went forth to his daily work in the dawn to tend the vines and labour with the warm brown earth and the woman was content to play her share in the great scheme of creation, keeping the home, cooking the simple meal for the good man's tired return, filling her days with honest occupation, unconscious of the great god "ennui" that ruled that other world.

And when the first glamour of married life had faded away, little children rose up to fill the gap with all the wonder of their young necessities, their little bodies and minds to train, and the link, gaining strength by responsibility, riveted instead of falling asunder.

So onwards—through days of strenuous work and nights of well-earned slumber until age claimed her dues and the younger generation stepped forward, took up the burden of toil and the parents rested, enjoying a brief spell of idle sunshine at the hands of the children they had reared until they sank into the endless sleep of all.

This was the simple scheme—true to the mother, Nature; the rest was deformity, man-made, bringing its own undoing, rebellion, licence, despair.

And of the two in a flash Candida knew the road that led to happiness—knew too without admitting it that it was closed to her; barred and blocked by the man she had chosen, whose character brooked no restraint.

He was the free lover—hewing out his own path-way for himself.

Where would it lead? She gave a little shiver. Below her the peasant sat silently, rocking the satisfied babe to sleep, her eyes, full of mother-love, bent on the tiny puckered face, one brown finger clasped in the wee clinging ones.

It was the human reflection of the cleverest picture religion has painted for mankind: the Madonna with the infant on her knee. And involuntarily Candida's eyes filled with tears as she realised yet another void in the lonely years of her marriage.

This—might have saved her!—might have brought her the happiness she so passionately longed for—might have safeguarded her even from Derrick's brilliant sophistry.

The shadows were lengthening over the valley as she got up with a few whispered words so as not to disturb the child and deaf to the peasant's protests emptied the contents of her little purse into the woman's lap.

"Not for you, then," she said in her broken Italian, "for the bambino—one day." She paused for a moment and bending down, kissed the sleeping child.

But as she stepped out into the sunshine a surprise awaited her.

She looked up at the sound of footsteps and saw a man, tall and fair, coming with great strides down the narrow path.

As he came nearer he gave an exclamation of surprise and raised his hat.

"Mrs. Clifton!" he cried, then as he saw her hesitation, he checked the impulse to hold out his hand and went on with a note of shyness in his voice,

"I daresay you don't remember me. I'm John Newcomen."

But her face cleared at once.

"Of course," she said, "how stupid of me—and it was you who took the message to Susan. I've often wanted to thank you." They shook hands and fell into step together.

"Are you staying here?"

"For the week-end, up at Ravello—and you? I went to the Santa Caterina and heard—" a shade of nervousness came into his voice—"you had both left," he finished the sentence bravely.

The colour flamed up into Candida's face—it was her first touch with the outside world beyond her palace of dreams.

"I am at the Cappucini," she said. "Mr. Kil'marny returned to London and I thought I should be more comfortable, now I have Susan, in the bigger hotel."

She was surprised herself at the ease with which she spoke. A curious feeling of relief came over Newcomen.

"A nice chap, that," he said heartily. "I should like to meet him again."

But Candida only smiled.

"And how are you now?" he continued as they turned the bend by the further paper-mill. "You don't look too strong."

He gave her a glance out of the keen blue eyes, noting the thinness of her face with the tell-tale shadows upon it and the droop of her delicate shoulders accentuated by the soft white dress.

"Oh, I'm alright," said Candida hastily—"only rather tired to-day—it was so hot coming up I nearly got a touch of the sun."

She recounted her little adventure with a return

to her old gaiety as they made their way down into the Piazza, glad of his cheery presence and somehow comforted by the very ring of his honest laugh.

With her usual spontaneity she confessed to it.

"It's awfully nice meeting you again—what have you been doing since the day you were turned so ruthlessly out of your room?"

"We've been to Sicily—there were great goings on in honour of the Royal visit. Would it bore you to hear about it?"

He fell into a long description and before they had almost realised the fact they were at the steep steps leading up to the Cappucini.

He held out his hand regretfully. How was she to know of the picture that had haunted him so persistently? the white face in its halo of chestnut hair, with the closed eyes and sweeping lashes in the darkened room at Sorrento, and the shadow of Derrick Kilmary that fell across the bed!

"Come up and dine with me?" She flushed a little with the effort to overcome a sudden shyness that beset her, and, as he hesitated, she added quickly,

"Do—it would be a real kindness. I get so weary of dining alone, night after night."

The sincerity of her accents touched him and he threw his scruples aside.

"It is very good of you," he said, "I shall be delighted—if you don't mind my coming like this—" he laughed, "unless you would rather I went back to Ravello and changed."

"How absurd!" She looked up at the towering heights he had left and continued as they started to mount the steps, "Personally I can never fathom the connection between food and dress and why one

costume should be sacred to it at all."

"Oh, it's a nice clean idea, isn't it?" said the sailor thoughtfully, "after the work of the day, a tub and a change—one feels a different man."

"Yes, but why a special set of clothes—all precisely alike, even to the waiters?" persisted the girl. "It shows such a want of originality—and yet year after year no man is brave enough to break through the custom and parade a fashion of his own."

"But think of the result if he did! Nine tenths of the average Britisher has no sense of taste whatever—remove his standard and you cast him back on himself for colour and form. Just picture the effect—the city clerk rampant in canary plush! or anything else daring and so-called 'original'—it makes one shudder to think of it. Now women are born with a sense of dress, I believe, but very few men can honestly aspire to it. I don't think your plan would work."

"Ah, but that's not due to nature—which hands over all brilliancy to the peacock and dresses his lady in quaker-grey!—and the same through all creation—we have reversed the order of things—" she laughed at his thoughtful expression. "But I think anything to relieve the monotony of the London colouring would be nice. I have a secret sympathy with your clerk in yellow and anyhow admire his daring in openly challenging a custom."

Candida was enjoying her argument and he looked down at the pretty flushed face with amusement.

"That's where we shouldn't agree, you know I'm an old-fashioned person and believe in custom, discipline and the like—it's no good tilting against windmills nowadays that I can see. Personally I

think there's too much freedom in the world."

"*Really?*" she looked interested. "I thought it was the one thing an Englishman fought for. It isn't dinner-time yet—let's sit on the terrace and talk it out."

They took two chairs at the end of the half-ruined cloister with its fine view over the bay and the worn stones that told of the feet of the monks in bygone centuries who had paced up and down, gazing over the same blue sea, meditating on the world beyond.

Newcomen stared out thoughtfully.

"It seems to me," he said, "freedom has become a mere catchword nowadays—a sort of political lever. Everything has to be free. Free trade—free love—free drinks!"

He laughed at the touch of bathos but continued seriously, "As a nation we are fast becoming hysterical over this freedom of ours. We've freed the working classes until agricultural labour is nearly extinct—we've freed our servants until they have taken the upper hand and boldly demand privileges we used to occasionally concede. We free our daughters until they openly laugh at their mothers' authority and we send them forth freely unchaperoned to meet the young man of the day who coolly preaches free love. What is to become of it all? For freedom run amok is licence."

His voice ceased, his thoughts running on undisturbed and a little silence fell between them.

"I don't see where it's to stop," he continued thoughtfully, "there's no authority respected—no discipline to harden the younger generation, only this cry for personal freedom! And when they've got it, what a dangerous weapon it is!"

"But surely you believe in freedom of opinion—

in the right of every man and woman to think for themselves?"

"Yes—but not to *act* for themselves—they must act for the community as well."

"You're an altruist, then?"

"Not altogether—it's more like this: I believe we are all part of a regulated scheme—and except in the case of genius or abnormal reasoning powers or even a talent for administration, I believe we do more harm than good both to ourselves and others by meddling. Of course every now and then a great man steps forward, a statesman or a liberator stirs up the world to action and removes a grave injustice—but he is a great man—he has the power, the forethought and the knowledge. Picture your clerk in canary attempting the same!"

But Candida was too interested to smile.

"And your 'regulated scheme'? Is it based on religious principles?"

"Certainly," said Newcomen calmly, "not being one of the privileged few who can afford to tilt against windmills, I require rules and regulations to guide me. I honestly find none more practical than in the beliefs of the church."

"Ah," said Candida. She gave a little sigh of impatience. "Now I'm out of my depths."

"But why?" he turned to her curiously. "You don't mind talking about it, do you?"

She shook her head and he continued: "I think sailors are often religious, you know—more often than not. But you—you hold other views?"

Again there came a little pause broken by the far-away note of a gong.

"That's dinner!"—she rose to her feet. "I am sure you must be famished after your long walk from Ravello. As for me——" she laughed back at

him over her shoulder as she led the way to the hotel door. "I'm so frightfully thirsty I am reveling in anticipation of your 'bête noire'—free drinks!"

And so, wilfully, thrust his question aside.

CHAPTER XIV

But during the evening, as they sat again on the terrace, drinking their coffee, high above the sleeping town, Newcomen with characteristic doggedness reverted to the subject.

Below them the huddled irregular roofs of the clustering houses cast long shadows in the moonlight, black patches marking the intervening archways and in the clear stillness they could hear the murmur of the sea, crescent bound, breaking on the narrow bank of shingle.

In the long paved cloister, through the lattice-work of vines, trailing from one worn pillar to another above their heads they could catch glimpses of the sapphire sky of night where the first bright stars were beginning to shew themselves.

"I can easily believe in an Infinite Force that made all this," said Candida softly as she drank in the peaceful scene, "but not in the Christ story."

Her voice held a note of defiance but the sailor answered her quietly.

"What seems so difficult in it? Don't answer unless you want to, but I think you are above that narrow prejudice of avoiding all mention of religion — what troubles you in such a simple
he ?"

"The cruelty of it." She leaned forward in her favourite attitude, her hands clasped round her knees, her head forward, the delicate profile strongly outlined against a tangled mass of vine.

"It is all pain, pain, pain!" Her voice rose vehemently.

"Picture an earthly father condemning his only son to a death upon the cross—to that awful torture of mind and body; when by lifting his little finger he could have saved him! And to what good—morally, materially? Even as an example, I do not hold with harrowing and frightening people into goodness. I *cannot* believe in crushing a man into a state of passive morality; extinguishing his manhood and vitality by suffering and calling it virtue. I believe in life—and nature—and love——"

She broke off suddenly, conscious of Newcomen's deep attention.

"And you," she said with a touch of nervousness under his steady gaze, "can you really, with an open mind, having gone deep into the subject, champion the Christian faith? Or do you do it blindly, like most men, accepting the handed-down tradition as they accept the game-laws or the political creed of their house?"

She gave a little laugh but he took up her challenge quickly.

"Certainly not—not blindly, I mean. I think perhaps we have more time for thought at sea than most men; cut off sometimes for days from land, alone in the solitude of big waters, in the silent watches of the night——"

A note of dreaminess crept into his voice that pleased Candida unaccountably as her vivid imagination called up the picture he painted and she scrutinised the strong weather-beaten face with its

keenness, its honesty and its hint of self-repression.

This was a man to trust in ; for a woman to lean on and feel stronger for it.

Not brilliant perhaps, but sound—sound to the core !

“ Let us take it absolutely apart from sentiment.”

Candida nodded approvingly and he continued,

“ I don't think sentiment ought to appear in religion. To me it is a code of rules ; a question of ethics and a comfortable assurance of another life after this . . . *far too short one !* ”

He spoke with the healthy zest for existence.

Can you imagine then any other code of rules, man-made or god-created—whichever you please—which could have survived over two thousand years and still continue to be adopted without any fundamental alteration or improvement in the present day ? In all its practical teaching, the doctrine of a Nazarene carpenter has survived the criticism of twenty centuries. Why, that alone is a miracle ! Think how the world has progressed—look for instance at naval tactics barely a hundred years ago, absolutely untenable in modern warfare ! Only a hundred years ago—and yet Christianity has lived through twenty times that period.”

“ And has brought down twenty centuries of persecution, bloodshed and martyrdom on the whole world ! ” Candida spoke hotly.

“ And what of other great causes ? They all have their fanatics and their victims. Despotic cruelty and self-immolation are not confined to Christianity. Look at kings beheaded, politicians assassinated ! Look at wars between countries, revolutions, every form of oppression unavenged. You can't lay it all down to the crucified Christ—it's the world that is wrong, not the doctrine.”

Unaccustomed to argument, woman-like she went off at a tangent.

"Then you believe the doctrine in its entirety? the Athanasian Creed, the damning of the weaker brethren—the totally unnatural 'turning of the other cheek' to your obviously exultant enemy, the theory of eternal punishment, of hell, and the devil——" She broke off breathlessly and despite himself, he laughed.

"I certainly don't believe I shall be pitched into a little fire of my own by a black gentleman with a tail and a two-pronged fork! I think a lot of mediæval nonsense has clustered round the original idea as it permeated the centuries and I don't say I believe it all. But as a workable and comfortable guide for an average man, I don't think it can be bettered—just that!"

"And you bend your knee to its ministers—to its little beardless boys who prate to you of life and sin and punishment in all the depths of their inexperience?"

"Ah, now—that's weak of you! You can't condemn a theory because the exponent stammers! You might as well cry down the whole navy because a submarine misbehaves. Remember—in the Church of Rome, anyhow, the preachers are some of the finest orators of the day, men of brilliant intellect, with a deep insight into human nature."

Off she went again, losing the thread.

"You are a Catholic, then?"

"Catholic, yes; not Roman Catholic. My own little church at home is good enough for me. Simpler too, and the air, to an outdoor man, easier to breathe than an incense laden one! You see, one gets back to my main idea of a preconcerted

scheme and myself as a mere unit in it. I don't suppose it much matters anyhow what I am—just one unimportant man in this wide universe for ever discarding and increasing its multitudes."

He pointed up to the sky above them.

"And this again is but a unit in all those million stars—doesn't it make you feel small and insignificant. That's nature's lesson—the relative value of individual life. Look at those worlds above us! And then, pile up against that the worth of one's personal opinion on—say, the Athanasian Creed!"

He paused for a moment, his eyes on the girl's eager absorbed face and his own grew suddenly tender as he proceeded.

"So I don't count it matters much what I believe and I take up the simplest, most cleanly, comfortable set of rules that I can find—not bothering my head with details in it that strike me as bigoted or obsolete, but just adopting the main outlines as a guide and help."

"And yet you are a man of science!" she answered his look of surprise swiftly—"all sailors are nowadays. It's no longer a question of seamanship—it's a knowledge of the forces that govern iron and steel—of electricity—explosives and such-like—it's a matter for mathematics rather than steering by the stars." She laughed. "You are taught to reason and accept facts only when demonstrated and proven and yet you swallow religion blindly with shut eyes, forsaking sound logic for the glamour of so-called 'faith'—for this story of two thousand years ago when, as you say, no sane man would accept the naval theories of nearly a century since!"

Her words rushed on with a note of scorn.

"And you take the Bible as hand-book—the lives of almost pre-historic men——" she smiled suddenly at her own exaggeration,

"D'you believe the Bible is inspired?"

"I'll answer you on your own grounds—that of its age: what other known book has survived the test? Has it ever occurred to you that most of our daily axioms of every-day conversation are from the Bible?"

"Or Shakespeare," said Candida mischievously.

"Well, even at that, think of another book that would stand comparison with Shakespeare?"

"Hardly a compliment to the Creator if you believe it inspired!" Candida's eyes twinkled.

"Why not? You forget He created Shakespeare too—his genius, his brain, the very hand that held the pen?—still more wonderful to my mind than the Bible!"

"The obvious reply is that Shakespeare's mother created him."

Newcomen smiled at her spirit, but refused to give her the advantage.

"Bringing us down to the mystery of birth; if you can explain away that, the last word has been said."

Unconsciously the girl's mind reverted to the scene of the afternoon, the dark-haired peasant with her baby on her knee and her simple outlook on life.

Simplicity. That was the keynote to happiness. A simple belief. That was what Newcomen preached—but he broke in upon her thread of thought.

"D'you ever read Browning? I'm not too fond of poetry myself but there are four lines my mother once wrote for me in a Bible the dear old lady gave

me before she died and I've always remembered them :

' I exult
That God—by God's own way occult
Shall—doth, I will maintain—bring back
All wanderers to the narrow track.'

" Well,—I believe that too, and I think it's better to make as straight a course for it as one can and avoid being hauled over hedges and ditches against your will; especially for a woman—it's too brutal!"

Candida looked up quickly, struck by the vehemence of his voice.

" Why?" she said, " why do you say that?"

But he gave her no answering glance and she repeated the question a little imperiously.

He looked away over the dark sea, shaping his reply.

" Because——"

He paused and started afresh. " I don't believe in the little devil with a red-hot fork but I'm inclined to think most sins find us out in this world. Now if a woman has no code of rules whatever and more time on her hands than she knows what to do with she generally obeys the impulse of the moment or is blindly led by the people around her. She is therefore at the mercy of her immediate environment. Of course lots of women are happily married and tied to simple occupations, but even then they are more prone to loneliness than a man and they have neither the physical nor mental force to combat it that a man has. There I think religion must be a great comfort and also a great defence."

Some subtle wire of telepathy must have sounded, for he went on,

"I am not speaking of the peasant class whose lives are too simple, too full of daily toil to feel the emptiness that the upper classes have often to contend with—but I am most awfully sorry for some of these so-called 'women of the world' whose butterfly existence hides such a dearth of interest—it's all the fault of the present ideas on marriage."

He rose to his feet. "I must be off," he said—"I hope I haven't tired you," for Candida's face was white and sad and his heart misgave him suddenly.

"I'm afraid I've been boring you—in my weakness for an argument?" His voice showed his self-reproach. "And you don't look a bit strong yet. That fever's a horrid thing, you know—you must take care of yourself—will you?"

"Don't go for a minute or two yet," she said, "it is quite early and I am not at all tired. Let us walk up and down. It is so nice to have someone to talk to—besides Susan," she laughed. "There's a subtle tribute to your eloquence."

They turned and paced the narrow cloister.

"I'm getting a little tired of this place," she went on. "I should make a move only I don't know where to go, and I don't want to leave the South just yet. I had thought of Cava."

"Have you been to Castellamare? There is a delightful hotel there perched on the hill among the vineyards and kept by a fine old Austrian who fought under Maximilian and has also been a singer of some repute. There's an odd career—battle-field, opera-house, pension!"

"It sounds rather a drop."

"Not when you see what an excellent host he makes! I think you would like the place and it's easy to get at. You drive to Cava, all along the

Corniche—choose a good day when the views are clear—and take the train on—only about half an hour and a short drive from the station and there you are!”

“I really think I shall,” said Candida. “It is getting too hot in this valley and a change will be a good thing.”

They had reached the end of the terrace and he held out his hand.

“Why not go some time this week and I could run over from Naples next Sunday and see you were comfortably settled. Hotel-Pension Weiss is the name and if you care to mention me——”

“I certainly will, if I may. Yes—it’s settled,” she laughed, “and if you come over we will have another argument. You won’t insist on taking me off to the English Church, will you?”

His eyes twinkled.

“I wouldn’t be responsible for your behaviour there. I’m much more likely to invite Susan! How is my old friend?”

“Oh! she often talks of you—it’s quite a case! so I hope you sufficiently realise the responsibility of asking a Devonshire country-woman to ‘go to church’ with you. I think I must decide for Cava after all—I can’t spare Susan at present!”

“It’s my county too you see, so I think I shall be properly cautious. Good-bye, now—and if I may suggest it, don’t go out in the midday sun, it’s really unsafe.” He gave her a warm handshake.

Half-way down the steps he turned and looked back at her where she stood leaning against the pillar, a frail fair picture in the moonlight, with her white dress and wind-blown hair and withal such a lonely little figure that a sudden wave of compassion swept over Newcomen.

"Poor little woman!" he said. "I don't believe she's too happy, somehow," and his face was grave as he started out on his long upward climb to Ravello.

CHAPTER XV

It was Sunday morning and Lady Mary sat up in bed sipping her tea thoughtfully, her letters open on the pillow beside her.

She had been too tired to read the last post overnight and now the contents brought her anything but pleasure.

Soon she must stir herself and prepare for Mass but even the pale gleams of spring sunshine filtering through the heavily-curtained windows could not rouse her from a sense of depression.

She felt the reaction of last night's party. Dirke had been in one of his most sphinx-like moods and the whole onus of the conversation had fallen on her shoulders.

Herapath, her latest admirer, had succumbed to the immature charms of Kitty Chesney—her own youthful cousin; the dinner had been late, the flowers too pink!—

And now Derrick had politely declined her Easter invitation.

She picked up the letter languidly and read it through again, weighing the simple excuse.

If he were in England, he wrote, he would feel it his duty to go down to Sir George for the brief holiday when he hoped to take advantage of their near neighbourhood to run over and see her.

There was however a chance he might be called abroad on a matter of business.

Abroad again! Instinctively she scented a mystery. For days past she had guessed at the influence of another woman, realising a subtle barrier that lay between them. Intimate as her friendship with Derrick still remained, it had by no means gone back to the footing of other days. Not that Lady Mary herself desired it; she was still under the spell of her new religion, but woman-like she chafed at the mere thought that the old attraction had weakened.

She had seen him constantly of late and the fact of his being so readily at her command convinced her that the rival she mistrusted was not to be found in London.

Now he himself had given her the clue to her whereabouts—some beautiful Italian, perhaps, who had ensnared him during the days of despondency that Lady Mary fondly pictured he had endured after her letter of dismissal.

She knew by experience that a man, wounded in his personal vanity by one woman, turns instinctively to another to build up his damaged pride, and she blamed herself for having administered the blow when he was furthest from her post of observation.

She tossed aside her other letters contemptuously; a pile of invitations to answer, two unpleasantly heavy bills, and a long rambling account from Dora Chesney, still on Lord Shotover's yacht.

They were off to Gib, discharging some of their load of guests at Marseilles, and picking up the host's youngest sister, whose husband was quartered at the former place, and a "literary celebrity" who had been finishing a book on Spain.

"Let us hope he will be amusing," wrote the girl.

"His name is Geoffrey Clifton—do you know it, by chance? Anyhow, if he has brains, he may prove a mental relief—I am getting rather tired of my country bumpkin!"

Lady Mary frowned impatiently as she read the lines; Dora was no longer a young girl and there were other and prettier sisters growing up. It was foolish of her to miss such an obviously eligible suitor. What did dulness matter? There were worse traits to be found in a husband than "dulness!"

There came a tap at the inner door and the maid entered with a telegram.

She tore it open with a certain eagerness. Had Derrick changed his mind after all? She knew his volatile nature.

No!—it was from Herapath, and ran: "Will you and Miss Chesney lunch to-day Prince's at two?"

She wrote the answer calmly under the shrewd eyes of the maid.

"Very sorry impossible—lunching Ranelagh," but after the door had closed an exclamation of anger escaped her lips.

Men were all alike, faithless, moved at the sight of a new face!

She pushed her breakfast tray away and picking up a book from the table beside her settled herself back to read.

For a brief spell she would dismiss all mankind from her mind and find rest for her tired body and brain in the distant world of imagination.

But here again her designs were thwarted. For the book had been lent her by Kilmarny—one of those vaguely indecent modern novels that good folks buy to "see themselves" if there's "really harm in it," and pass on to their friends to confirm the opinion; then marvel at its circulation!

And as she propped it back against a wall of pillows and settled herself down comfortably to read, a paper slipped out from between the leaves and riveted her attention.

For it was covered with writing in Derrick's well-known hand with here and there a word erased or supplemented and the opening line gave her a mental shock.

For the verses—as at first sight they seemed to be—were inscribed :

" TO CANDIDA "

She read them slowly, stumbling over the uneven metre.

Let us love each other on the hill-top,
On the high hill-top, swept by the winds of Heaven.
Fearless, as the birds of the air,
As the eagle from his eerie above the world
Loves and seeks his mate ;
Beneath us the green slopes, the herds of kine
The hand of man, made manifest in his toil ;
Round us the solitude, the sunshine, the winds of Heaven
And in our hearts, love !

" Let us love each other in the silent valleys,
Wooded, mysterious ; full of the twitter of birds,
The stirring of leaves and the stealthy footsteps
Of creatures, creeping up and down, stalking their prey.
With the high branches around us
And the branches below us mingling innumerable
branches—

Like them clinging, like them mingling,
In the half-light, in the mystery
Of love, the love in our hearts !

" Let us love each other in the shuttered houses,
Penned in, caged, imprisoned ! And yet free.
Free of the sleeping town, free of the watchman
Pacing the lonely streets, crying the hour—
Free of the world, its narrow limitations,
Freed by the power of love—infinite, immeasurable,
Joining the eagle on the lonely hill-top
Joining the red fox in the sheltered valley
In the great song of Nature and the love that is in our
hearts."

The passion of the words left her totally untouched in her intense curiosity around its dedication.

For who was "Candida"? Who could "Candida" be?

The want of rhythm in the stanzas annoyed her. She summed it up contemptuously as a "straining after effect," and a memory of a fiery argument in the early days of her friendship with Derrick returned to haunt her with its interwoven surroundings.

He had tried to interest her in Walt Whitman but failed.

There had been a moment of disenchantment which both had realised before he had flung the book aside and descended to her lower plane of thought. And he had never read poetry to her again, had ceased to write her verses.

But he had written these! and lately. She was certain of that, had written them for "Candida's" eyes.

Who in Heaven's name was "Candida"?

She stared down at the lines in a sudden spasm of jealousy; then turned over the leaves of the volume, hoping for further discoveries. No. There was nothing more to be gleaned. She glanced at the title-page, where the owner's name was hurriedly scrawled in pencil with underneath "Amalfi" and the date.

Was there any connection between the two—"Candida" and "Amalfi"?

Was this the "matter of business" that called him abroad, away from his work, away from herself?

All her spirit for intrigue was aroused as she rang the bell and ordered her bath, locking away the

verses carefully in an inner drawer of the high satin-wood writing-table.

And the words, inspired by love in the sunshine, rubbed shoulders with notes in the same free hand, breathing of ballroom rendezvous and many a stolen meeting in the scented London boudoir.

When she returned from church she hunted up Dirke, poring over blue books in his sanctum and together they drove Kitty Chesney and the new secretary, young Vannitt, down to Ranelagh for lunch.

But Lady Mary was obviously self-absorbed. Even her cousin's reiterated allusion to "that nice Captain Herapath" could not stir her into battle and at last Kitty gave it up in despair and settled down to a steady attack on Dirke, who smiled obliquely upon her from his impenetrable fortress much as a harassed mastiff regards a teasing terrier!

Claude Vannitt, still a little doubtful of his exact position in the household, filled the conversational gaps, treating Dirke with deference and Lady Mary with a hint of admiration.

The whole thing was banal, British and correct! The church-bells rang, insisting noisily upon the Sabbath day and the populace disported itself stiffly, filling the shuttered streets with a sense of broad-cloth and respectability, as the clock swung slowly forward towards the one break in the universal monotony—the hour for hot roast beef.

Even the fresh splendour of springtide as the carriage swung round into the grounds held its note of restraint in the carefully-clipped hedges and decorously smooth lawns and on the terrace in the sunshine the London women in floating veils and gloves and dainty wraps brought in an atmosphere of unreality among the flowering lilacs and masses of budding may.

It was the spring of a Watteau picture. Not that naked masterpiece of Mother Nature's brush!

But all the time, like a steady refrain, down the long Hammersmith road, over the river bridge, up the broad staircase past the unwelcoming faces of dead and gone members of the "Kit-cat Club", a name was ringing in Lady Mary's ears—"Candida" and again "Candida"!

On the terrace the conversation drifted to recent literature and she got her opportunity.

"Is there a book called 'Candida'?—does anyone know?"

Vannitt interposed, glad to parade his knowledge.

"Certainly—a play, by Bernard Shaw. I have a copy at home, would you care to read it?"

She looked up quickly, interested at once.

"By Bernard Shaw? He wrote 'Man and Superman,' did he not? I remember going to it and being somewhat bored. I can't think why people all liked it so. Of course it's witty and rather—unpleasant!" She laughed. "But the plot—there's no plot in it!" she broke off suddenly.

"And he wrote a play called 'Candida'?" She pronounced the name with a touch of unconscious disdain and her mind wandered off again as Vannitt in his clear precise voice enlarged on the theme for her benefit.

Derrick had always been a devout admirer of Bernard Shaw. Could "Candida" after all, prove but a creature of fiction, a modern peg to hang his verses on and not a living dangerous personality?

She gave a sudden sigh of relief, of resolve taken, as they moved down the corridor to lunch; she would leave it at that for the present, but she would remember the name.

With a lightening of spirit she settled herself at

the table in the window and started to tease her pretty cousin over the easy conquest of Herapath, mischievously hinting at the gallant captain's well-known susceptibility and minimising by contrast the fascination of the girl.

But Kitty saw through the game.

"He's far too old anyhow," she retorted, her retroussé nose in the air, her brown eyes sparkling with the light of battle; "you can have him yourself, Mary—he's a regular 'muffin-party man'"—she paused, choosing her weapon skilfully; "if you want to be *really* generous now, hand over Derrick Kilmarney, he's just the age for me!"

She darted a wicked glance at Dirke, then back to her victim as a faint tinge of pink stole into the pale face. Vannitt's eyes were riveted on his curried prawns and there came a little pause.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Lady Mary's voice when she spoke was coolly amused. "I'm afraid I can't *give* you a husband, my dear, but I feel sure you're quite capable of eventually finding one for yourself!"

Everyone laughed, with a faint feeling of relief. Only the very young feel the fascination of venturing so near to the danger-board.

"I pity the poor chap," said Dirke smoothly. "Think of the life she'll lead him!"

"I shan't lead him at all," said the wise Kitty, "he can lead himself, wherever he likes! so long as he gives me a free hand."

"And pays up!" suggested Dirke with a smile. "I see you've got quite the right idea of matrimony."

But Kitty was too interested in a group entering the room to retort.

"Do look at these people," she murmured. "And

that hat with the feather, and the fat woman leading— isn't she *pleased*? Everything about her is bursting with prosperity, from her fat white gloves to her fat gold purse."

Vannitt stole a glance at the tight over-dressed figure.

"It's Mrs. de Merliton," he said in an undertone, as they settled themselves with a vast amount of ceremony at the round table beyond. "With a nice select party."

He smiled sarcastically, detailing them for Kitty's benefit. "Isaacson, the Jewish M. P. and his wife; just look at the rings on her fingers—she can hardly hold her fork—'buttressed with diamonds'—as I heard a man say the other day. The little fair man is a stockbroker, watching for his chance with an eye on the menu."

"Serving two gods at once," broke in the irrepressible Kitty, "his Pocket and his Little Mary."

She stopped suddenly, as a loud voice from the round table reached her ears.

"Yes, that's Dirke, so it is! the one beside the girl with the red hair."

Kitty flushed up angrily, wounded in her tenderest point. Her hair was red, purely red without a shadow of doubt.

"I wonder she's sober enough to see," she muttered between her small white teeth.

Lady Mary leaned forward with a frown.

"You are not to say those things, Kitty! You will get into trouble on day; I have told you so before."

"Well, everyone knows about that dance at the Grafton Galleries," said the girl in quick defiance, "*everyone*! I only wish I had seen her myself reeling about with that other advocate of temperance, your fair namesake, Mary!"

"Scandal again!" Dirke shrugged his shoulders. "Oh! you women—give me the menu, Vannitt, I refuse to listen."

"Yes, but how is it?" Kitty persisted; "people like that get everywhere—I can't understand it!" She passed the card across. "Try the 'mousse'—it's always good here."

He ignored her advice, returning to the charge.

"You're wrong there too, you don't discriminate. They get in by entrance-money alone, and not 'everywhere.'" His voice was sardonic—"Only where they can pay. And there are still a few houses who don't charge for admission and refuse to answer the rat-tat-tat of the golden knocker! For instance——"

He paused, pointedly, his eyes on the door, where a woman was just entering from the garden, with two men beside her.

Despite the simplicity of her short walking-dress she carried herself with an air of confidence, and as she passed their table gave Lady Mary a bright nod of greeting.

"Isn't it lovely to-day?" she said, "really spring at last. I've been walking with my golfers and trying to imagine myself back at dear Hurstinglea. I hate London, you know—" she laughed with a sweet silvery note; "come out and join us afterwards if you can, I'm too hungry to stop now!"

The trio passed on down the room and Kitty looked up with a name on her lips at Dirke enquiringly, her face a little pink.

"Exactly," he said in answer to it, "simple and charming as ever and typical in her way too. Why can't the modern woman copy that instead of the latest actress!"

"Because 'sweet simplicity' in one's own home is

not nearly so fascinating as in other people's," and Lady Mary stifled a yawn. "How hot this room gets!" She signed to a waiter to open the window.

The buzz, momentarily hushed, rose again from the round table, where Mrs. de Merlinton's heavily-powdered face, flushed with food and excitement, rose like a harvest-moon over her brimming glass.

"I *know* it is," she nodded her gorgeous hat until the purple feather threatened immediate flight. "You'd never guess it, would you? in that dowdy get-up. She was at the bazaar yesterday, just the same. They are a shabby lot!"

"Ah! she can afford to be," said the Jew shrewdly in his thick voice. He gave a glance across the table at his costly wife and heaved a sudden sigh in which pride and avarice were strangely blended.

"It takes a duke to wear a threadbare coat nowadays." He aired the platitude bravely, careless of listening ears.

"Out of the mouths of babes and—tycophants," said Dirke with a fine irony. "She can afford to be simple. That is the crux of the whole matter—and she has the wisdom to see it—to live her own life in her own way without a straining after effect or a fear of public opinion. Simplicity——"

He gave a little tired laugh.

Lady Mary's eyes watched him mockingly under their heavy lids, without sympathy or even that next best thing "marital understanding" born of the years together.

She turned to Vannitt, alert, attentive, the "perfect secretary"—as advertised.

"I am always a little afraid of Mr. Dirke when he talks like that. What would the party say if he gave up politics for the simpler life?"

"At the present juncture they'd probably say

'Thank God '!' said Dirke grimly, "which reminds me, Mary, I want you to ask Strachey-Seenet and his wife to lunch one day next week to meet Kilmarny—Thursday or Friday would be best."

He glanced up carelessly at her slight gesture of annoyance.

"Oh! I know you don't care for them, but—" his voice grew stern, "it has to be."

Kitty looked at him curiously; at the nervous face; the whole air of mental tension about him; the deep discoloured shadows round the eyes. The power he wielded so mercilessly was at the cost of constant high pressure—not the force of solid weight, but the tested strength of a fine-drawn wire.

She did not get as far in her youthful reasoning to arrive at the possibility of a snapping point.

Only Dirke knew this: realised it in the agony of the lonely hours of the night, as he saw the palace of his dreams falling about his ears—all the carefully-added buttresses, the pillars he had reared, swaying, toppling, crashing down.

And like the prophet of old, with the summons already ringing in his heart, he cast about for one worthy of his mantle—one in whose hands, when the inevitable occurred, he could leave the mighty work of restoration.

It had been a one-man effort and now on the threshold of victory, mortality, forbidding such a monopoly of intention, threatened that it should perish in splendid isolation along with its creator.

And so, forced to this realisation, he turned instinctively to his disciple; to the man he had steadily trained who yet could think for himself and had that supreme gift of the gods, an eloquent tongue—Derrick Kilmarny.

And Lady Mary thought of her lover and then of

the vague danger a name had conjured up—of
 "Candida"—Candida the unknown!

On board Shotover's yacht Geoffrey Clifton finished his book.

And far away in distant Amalfi Candida dreamed again of the man she adored—trusting—waiting—longing.

And the circle of Fate widened.

CHAPTER XVI

Meanwhile events had been running smoothly for Derrick Kilmarny.

He had settled down into his habitual London stride with ever before his eyes the sense of carving his own career and the infinite possibilities of the future.

With Dirke's powerful supporting arm and Lady Mary's social leverage aided by his own undeniable personal charm and long training in the busy political house he had, as he told himself with a growing complacency, as fair a chance of success as any man could wish.

But two things, he realised, were vitally important, and they in turn narrowed down to his relations with the two women, who so far, had left the deepest impression on his life, Candida Clifton and Dirke's beautiful wife.

It was as urgently necessary to conceal his intrigue with the former as it was to hold the good graces of the latter imperious lady.

Fond as he still remained of the bright-haired companion of his Amalfi idyl he yet felt their temporary separation judicious. He was too much before the eyes of the public to risk a single false step. He added the rider "both for her sake and mine," in an effort to sentimentalise.

But whereas Candida was suffering acutely from the loneliness of his absence, Derrick, engrossed in that most important factor, himself, and surrounded by a host of friends, with every form of amusement within his grasp, could hardly expect her to reach the same heights of reasonableness.

And in the daily memory of his promise to return, she was beginning to chafe under his prolonged absence.

With the result that her letters shewed less and less of herself and more of the disappointment under which she laboured.

So, on the morning in question, our hero, far from his usual happy optimism, started his day in the gloomy conclusion that life was not worth living—after all, a very popular theory of the breakfast hour!

The real facts were these; he had been induced the night before, after a heavy day's work with Dirke, to go on with friends to a late dance, and to spur himself into a fitting semblance of gaiety he had freely indulged in Ball-Champagne, a brand which in calmer moments he would have immediately recognised as poison.

This thought alone added to the irritation of a throbbing headache and then to complete the situation, the postman had brought him more worries to combat, in fact a real conundrum to solve.

He sat in the big arm-chair of his comfortable rooms in Jermyn Street, his discarded breakfast by his side, a frown of disgust on his handsome face.

He had taken his morning tub, but energy had failed him at the moment of dressing and the sunny day favouring the scheme of a scanty costume, he had decided to postpone the inevitable moment of wrestling with his collar-stud.

So behold him, with bared throat and ruffled curly hair, the big handsome sulky man, under a cloud of his own raising, petting himself in all the luxury of his surroundings, with the consciousness of his own misery!

First, there was the letter from Candida. She begged his immediate return; wrote under such evident stress of emotion that had he not guessed the cause, as he told himself, he would most certainly have been alarmed.

"If you have any love left in your heart," she wrote, "I beg you to come to me. I am in the greatest trouble. To whom can I turn but to you? Nothing but grave necessity would induce me to write like this—to beg you to leave your work and pleasures in town and return—if only for a day! Surely after all that has passed I need not ask in vain!—"

In his irritable frame of mind the words held a hint of command, the suggestion of a claim upon him, infringing his law of perfect independence.

And then the allusion to his "pleasures" in town! The random shot had told and he resented the inference. How often had he bade her believe that work and work alone accounted for the lengthening spell of separation.

He remembered of old her extravagance of language.

She had laughingly admitted to using "only superlatives" and now, as ever, he told himself, she exaggerated some small affair.

In fact, he already divined the mystery she hinted at.

An allusion of Lady Mary's to Shotover and his party had made Derrick aware of the fact that Geoffrey Clifton was already in the South.

Candida, startled by the news of his approach, had no doubt worked herself into a state of hysterical wretchedness at the thought, not only of the meeting but of the short space of time remaining which the lovers could call their own.

In a sunnier mood the same idea would have moved Derrick himself, despite the fact that the stress of material London life had fogged his first purest impressions of love in the sunshine.

But a man cannot live daily up to the boiling-point of love. He has his hours of passion, of fine unselfishness, of utter absorption in the life of the beloved one, but between these hours he is more self-centred, more practical than a woman, easier engrossed in the occupation of the moment and he can make his love a thing absolutely apart from his daily round of existence.

Women so rarely realise this and much misunderstanding ensues. Physically and mentally they are always ready for love and they weave it into the slightest doings and thoughts of the moment until it becomes their shadow, dodging their every footstep, banished only when love itself dies.

They believe a man should carry his love about as surely as he carries his handkerchief and never put it away under stern lock and key to be produced at a more convenient time.

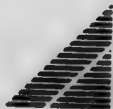
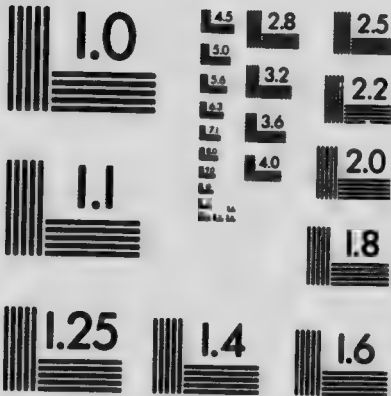
Derrick, deeply absorbed in his own career, a normal, selfish man, unconsciously influenced by constant association with another woman, had temporarily laid his love aside; quite reverently in folds of lavender until the right moment should arrive, but on an upper shelf, well out of sight.

And now Candida herself had dragged it forward, complicating his whole scheme of conduct by asserting her right to his attention.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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A ray of sunshine fell across his eyes and he pushed his chair back impatiently against the writing-table behind him.

There was a clatter of fallen metal and he stooped to pick up the silver frame his movement had dislodged.

Within was a portrait of Candida; and as he looked into the sweet face, with its infinite capacity for love and sympathy, the blue eyes smiling, the red lips parted in her gay frank laugh, it struck such a contrast with the sadness of the letter in his hand that a sudden twinge of compunction shot through him.

He studied it closely a moment in silence. Then "far too sensitive," he judged, "too highly-wrought for the life of to-day," and he gave an impatient sigh, sublimely unconscious that it was this finely-strung quality of hers, the very cutting of the gem that had made him so desirous of possessing it.

Man-like, he claimed the rarest instrument for love, then turned upon it for the tension of its strings!

But he laid the photo down regretfully.

"Hang it all! I'd go if I could, I'm awfully fond of the little woman; with all her faults there's no one like her, but it's impossible—worse than that, mad, at present."

Slowly he reopened the other letter, sealed with mauve wax and a bay leaf "for friendship," exhaling a faint perfume, full of memories.

Cleverly-worded, delicately-conveyed, it was an ultimatum.

Lady Mary had been seriously disappointed, so she wrote, by his refusal of her invitation for Easter.

The house-party had been arranged by her solely

for his sake. She had been at great pains to collect certain pieces from her political chessboard, pawns to safeguard the progress of her knight. She had done this for the sake of their old friendship and for the interest she was bound to feel in his initial plunge into political life.

She could not believe that he would honestly refuse the right hand of fellowship so sincerely offered him.

Followed a few skilfully-veiled allusions to the past, and the hope that the future, though of necessity platonic, might still possess the happiness of constant association with herself and Julian and that Derrick might appreciate the deep confidence she still felt in him and her interest in his career.

She wound up in the certainty that he would reconsider his decision and fall in with her friendly schemes for his advancement.

Derrick's face was anything but appreciative when he laid the letter down.

For it was a very nice point indeed.

He could not afford to quarrel with Lady Mary Dirke but he mistrusted the wisdom of binding himself down to any form of alliance with her.

He would have preferred to "sit on the fence," but she left him no choice of doing so.

He was honourable enough at heart, despite his lazy modern principles, to despise the thought of being drawn back into the meshes of an old liaison, admittedly loving another woman; and he doubted the security of the wall of religion Lady Mary had built between them. What if it crumbled under his touch? It was just the fact of the barrier that made their daily intercourse possible.

For there was no love in it, no real love.

He got up and walked restlessly up and down.

It was a profanation of the very word. All the finest part of his character had been stirred by his love for Candida, all that had remained fresh and vigorous and sincere.

In comparison that other had been a hot-house growth; a poisonous orchid at its best.

He paused in front of the mirror to consider his unshaved chin, dallying with the decision before him.

What the devil was he to do? Easter was close at hand; he must decide, and that shortly.

The sunshine poured in at the open window and a sudden memory of blue skies and seas swept over him, of red-gold hair and the clasp of the little brown hands!

Instinctively he turned to his desk for the foreign telegraph-forms.

He would go to her. He was the lover—albeit free! Love claimed him and he would obey; but as he reached for his pen, the telephone-bell rang sharply in his ears.

He picked up the receiver and answered impatiently—

"Hullo!"

And a voice came back.

"Is that Mr. Kilmarney? It is I, Kitty Chesney. Cousin Mary wants you."

There was a little stir and confusion of sounds. Then the slow throaty voice he knew so well.

"Good-morning, Derry. I hope I'm not disturbing your beauty-sleep, but the fact is I've just had a wire from S——," she mentioned a well known name, "he's coming to us for Easter, so my party's complete now—but as I asked him to meet you I thought I would ring you up—" and there came an artistic pause.

Derrick took his courage in both hands.

"It's most awfully good of you," he began, "and I don't really know how to tell you—but the fact is," he cleared his throat, his voice jerky with nervousness, "I'm bound to go abroad. There's no way out that I can see—I'm awfully disappointed—and——"

But Lady Mary broke in quickly.

"Leaving me saddled with all these deadly people on my hands—so much for man's ingratitude!" her voice was full of scorn and her listener winced.

"You got my letter this morning?"

Derrick acquiesced.

"Yes, and it made it all the harder—don't think me ungrateful, Mary—but this business is pressing—I *must* go."

There was a ring of sincerity in his utterance but Lady Mary hardened her heart, scenting a mystery, piqued to the quick by his steady refusal, savage with the instinct of being robbed, robbed of her legitimate prey by an unknown "Candida."

"Well—I wash my hands of you."

The little hard laugh that reached him only accentuated her purpose, and Derrick felt the ground slipping away from under his feet.

The folly of it!—the futile folly of making such a powerful enemy!

All the irritation of the morning, the physical incapacity caused by his evening's dissipation, the consequent mental inability to cope with the situation, roused the animal in him, and made him savage.

Tied first to one woman, then another. To hell with them, he would think for himself! He was not a ball to be tossed from hand to hand. He called down the telephone—

"Wait a minute please."

His voice was authoritative and Lady Mary with her intuitive knowledge of men smiled, as she stood there, silently waiting.

In an effort at steady concentration, it dawned on him suddenly; he would compromise with both. After all, he was master of the situation—they could not coerce him against his will.

Then he turned to the telephone.

"Since you make such a point of it and as I do not wish you to think me ungrateful—" ("the lordling" said Dirke's wife under her breath)—"I will put off my journey abroad until Tuesday and come, if you will allow me, for the bare week-end."

She stifled the strong desire to laugh. She had gained her point and victory was sweet—even at a price.

"I shall be delighted to have you," she said a little stiffly. "Will you let me know your train and the motor shall meet you at the Junction. Au revoir!" the bell rang and it was over.

He went into his room to dress, still under the influence of his temper, but before long his mood changed, broken by its own violence.

"After all," he said, "it was jolly kind of Mary to take so much trouble and I couldn't very well throw her over at the last minute. Two or three days won't make much difference and I can explain everything to Candida when I see her—it's much easier than writing so I'll just wire I am coming soon and then wire again."

But the Thursday following still found him down at the Dirke's and when he returned to his rooms on Friday to pack and depart a telegram was awaiting him from abroad.

He tore it open, a shade anxiously. It was short and to the point.

"Too late expecting Geoffrey to-morrow."

For the life of him he did not know whether to be sorry or relieved.

CHAPTER XVII

The little train crawled slowly round the shore of the wide Bay of Naples, through Portici and the two Torres, deep in lava, past ruined vineyards and the once-fertile slopes of Vesuvius, and, skirting Pompeii with its strange lines of roofless dwellings, saved by a miracle from a second visitation, turned round the further curve into the terminus at sleepy Castellamare.

The midday heat, rendered more intolerable by the clouds of dust that rose from the stricken land, failed to touch Newcomen, lost in thought in the corner of the empty carriage.

He had not seen Candida for over a week and his mind was full of the coming meeting, probably the first in that sun-scorched land; for she had told him her husband's unlooked for visit and his intention of taking her home with him on his friend's yacht.

It was not so much the news that had troubled him as the air of weary indifference with which she had detailed it and her utter want of enthusiasm, so foreign to her nature.

He wondered a little at the relations between her and Geoffrey Clifton, with a certain vague uneasiness as to the personality of the latter. But he was not the man to jump to hasty conclusions.

Sympathetic by nature he yet lacked intuition and his lines of thought were run on a steady basis of reasoning, unlike Kilmarney, whose brilliant results were often arrived at by means of a "happy shot."

Now he was trying to work back slowly to the change in Candida he had noticed of late; the dimming of her natural brightness, the intense "*joie de vivre*" that had been such a feature in the character of the woman he so much admired.

He honestly admitted to the feeling she evoked, calling it "friendship" and firmly believing it such—such and no more!

In his sharply-defined groove of morality he ignored the possibility of a warmer sentiment. The mere fact of her being the wife of another man closed the door to any such reflections and the only flaw, to his mind, in the beauty of their intercourse was the hint of danger that—with his knowledge of the world and the London man's code of honour—he associated with the name of Derrick Kilmarney.

For every now and again like the serpent in the Garden there stole a memory of the opening scene at Sorrento.

He knew the warm impulsiveness of Candida's nature, her ardent necessity for sympathy, the quickness with which her mind leaped forth to meet its fellow, and in his heart he blamed Geoffrey Clifton, absorbed in dying literature, heedless of his young and living wife!

She was not the woman to wander, idle, on the Continent, alone.

She was too Bohemian, too ready to spurn convention, too trusting in those around her.

She lacked the social knowledge that would have warned her in times of danger.

Her very courage itself—a sort of boyish love of

adventuring into the unknown—might be easily misconstrued by men on a lower plane of thought, whilst her undeniable beauty had not even the protection of an English stiffness of manner.

She went forth fearlessly, her blue eyes shining, her quick young body driven by the enquiring mind within to grasp each outstretched hand that greeted her on the broad highway—heedless of common danger!

And now it seemed to him she had over-reached herself; had met with a serious check in her smiling course, that stunning her, had numbed her powers of enjoyment.

She moved as one in a dream, listlessly, and every now and then—his wits sharpened by the love he would not admit—he caught a new atmosphere about her—a hint of pain and distress—that moved him unaccountably.

The train pulled up with a jerk and he jumped out hastily, colliding with another passenger—an elderly man with a fair Vandyke beard and slight stoop of the narrow shoulders.

As Newcomen murmured an apology the other took blame to himself courteously in fluent Italian and his pale grey eyes rested for a moment on the sailor's sunburnt face. Then with a nervous smile, recognising a fellow-countryman, he added,

"There seems a dearth of porters to-day."

Newcomen laughed.

"They're all asleep in the Piazza, I expect, at this hour. If I see one I'll wake him and send him back to you."

Which, with his tendency to help lame dogs over stiles, he methodically proceeded to do; then, crossing the town, rode briskly up the winding road to the pension on the hill.

The Signora was in the vineyard, the porter thought, and refusing his offer of assistance, Newcomen set forth to find her himself.

He walked along the terrace and into the empty garden. There was a swift scamper of lizards as he opened the door in the high stone wall and paused for a moment to admire the scene before him.

To his left, slope after slope of budding vines reached up the far hillside, in lines of gnarled brown stems, clinging tendrils and delicate green arcades. Down the sheer drop of the land on his right he could see the grey huddled roofs of the town below, striking a soft note against the fierce blue of the Mediterranean and here and there between the scattered houses were dashes of ivory-white where the macaroni, hung out to dry, gleamed in the midday sunshine.

Above all was the cloudless radiating sky and towards the west, Vesuvius, white and solemn in his ash-strewn garment of repentance, reared a diminished crest against the peaceful Heavens.

Newcomen chose the winding path that skirted the deep ravine, for at the far end he remembered a pergola, relic of a half-ruined villa and buried in a wilderness of neglected flowers.

It was Candida's favourite haunt and there, as he had guessed, he found her recognising from afar the glint of her red-gold hair through a broken lattice of rose-leaves.

At first, as he softly approached over the dusty ground, he thought she must be asleep.

Her head, supported on her hands, was bent a little forward and from where he could catch but the rounded outline of her cheek and a mass of tumbled curls.

At the sight a sudden swift joy ran through him and involuntarily he quickened his steps but as he

reached the narrow entrance and called her by her name all the gladness was swept away as quickly as it had come.

For the startled face she raised at his approach was wet with tears and under her sorrowful eyes were shadows that told of the sleepless vigils of the night.

"Mrs. Clifton!" He stopped against. As he hesitated, torn by the conflicting counsels of sympathy and discretion, she solved the problem for him, holding her hands out frankly like a child.

"Don't go," she said and the smile she forced hurt him deeper than her tears—such a wan ghost of the natural one, as unlike Candida as was the whole inexplicable air of grief.

"Since you've caught me," she went on bravely, "it's no good pretending, I suppose. I'm rather unhappy just now. That's all!"

He was so moved by her candour that his wits deserted him and all he could stammer forth was—

"I'm so sorry—so *awfully* sorry—— Then bluntly—"Whatever's the matter?"

She took her hands gently away from his firm clasp and looked up in the keen kind face with a sudden sensation of comfort.

He looked so strong and capable and withal, so honest!

"I can't tell you," she said slowly, at last, "I almost wish I could!"

A sudden shiver swept across her and the look of pain he dreaded came into her tear-stained face.

"Oh, no!—no. . ." She clasped her fingers together with a swift gesture as though thrusting the thought aside and went on more calmly.

"I suppose it's being 'dragged over the hedges

and ditches just 'at! You remember our talk at Amalfi!"

He nodded his head gravely, his mind searching vainly for a clue.

"As you say, it's nasty for a woman," her voice hardened, "and it's always the woman who pays, *always, always!*"

She struck the table with her little clenched hand.

"The injustice of it! It's a cruel world."

Her burst of anger relieved him. It was more natural, more like the Candida of old.

"Don't tell me if you'd rather not"—his grave eyes met her own over the narrow table separating them—"but is there nothing to be done? Can't anyone help you?"

But she gazed past him silently over the wide expanse of sea with the same set look of hopelessness.

"I know—of course, it sounds almost impertinent," he stammered a little in his eagerness. "You've known me so short a time, but couldn't you look up on me as a friend—a real staunch friend—and if there's anything I can do to help, just trust me to do it?"

Their eyes met again in a long searching glance; his, full of honest trouble, pleading for a share of her confidence, clear blue eyes, that gave his secret away.

Hers, blue too, marked with tears and touched by his genuine sympathy but helpless in the grip of her inward knowledge.

"I can't," she repeated, "I simply can't tell you. And there is nothing to be done, no remedy, that is the worst of it! I must 'dree my own weird'," she gave an odd laugh and her voice softened again,

"You *are* helping me though, more than you think—more perhaps than I deserve."

He bowed his head before the definite note of her decision and his eyes fell on a crumpled sheet of blue that lay at her feet.

Mechanically, unconscious of what he did, his eyes spelt out the message on it.

"Departure delayed. Hope Sunday Derrick."

The next moment he realised what he had done but the guilty consciousness of having stumbled upon a secret could not blind him to the importance of the words.

So Kilmarny was playing his share in this act of tragedy as he had played it before in all the sunny romance of the Sorrento setting!

A sudden fierce anger against the debonnair young Irishman seized upon the sailor at the thought.

But with it there came the realisation that he could not take advantage of his ill-gotten knowledge and when he broke the silence he chose another line of attack.

If only she would tell him and ease the tension of her mood.

He chose his words carefully.

"Your husband arrives to-morrow? You will not be alone any more?"

She nodded her head and with her fingers she drummed nervously against the edge of the lattice-work.

"And you return to England?"

"Next week, I believe." Again the flat lack of interest.

"You will be sorry to leave the South." He spoke with a note of constraint, a little uncertain of his ground but she caught him up with a sudden flash of her old spirit.

"Sorry! more than glad! I am sick to death of it all, the dust, the glare, the perpetual unblinking blueness!"

"You!" he shewed his astonishment openly. "Why, I thought you were a 'sun-worshipper'?"

He could not have lighted on a more unlucky phrase, bringing, as it did, a host of memories in its wake; taking her back to the golden Capri days, to her meeting with the man she loved and all the innocent joys of the early part of their friendship.

A "sun-worshipper"! As in a dream she could see herself climbing the steep rocky paths, so sure of herself and of life, the yellow dog by her side, glorying in the sunshine, singing as she went—

*"L'amour vient, l'amour s'en va!
Tra-la-li-là; tra-la-li-là!"*

She put her hands up quickly to her throat with a feeling of suffocation and her face went so white that Newcomen feared she was going to faint.

"You are ill?" he rose quickly to his feet.

But she pulled herself together at the sound of his anxious voice.

"It is nothing," she said with an effort. "I am not—quite myself to-day——"

She held out her hands to him with a wan smile.

"Will you come again—soon—and say good-bye? Forgive my apparent rudeness."

But he broke in swiftly,

"There can be no rudeness between you and me—I will go."

For a moment he hesitated.

"Mayn't I see you back to the house first?—you look so white."

"I am alright—really—and thank you more than

words can say, for your sympathy—" her blue eyes filled with tears—"good-bye."

With a sudden uncontrollable impulse he bent down and kissed the little hands that lay within his own.

"God bless you." His voice shook and the next moment he had turned down the winding path and was lost in the vineyard beyond.

So quickly did he go and so absorbed in the thoughts that raced each other through his troubled brain that he never noticed the silent figure standing by the ruined villa steps—a man with the stoop of the student betrayed in his narrow shoulders, with light gray eyes and a pointed Vandyke beard.

For a moment Geoffrey Clifton—for it was he—stood there irresolute.

Then as the woman in the arbour, in the sudden relief of solitude buried her head in her hands, her slender shoulders shaken with sobs—he turned round slowly and as noiselessly as he had come made his way back to the distant hotel.

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PART III

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

CHAPTER XVIII

The season was drawing rapidly to a close. Already houses were being shut and a steady stream of box-laden cabs moved over the thinning thoroughfares towards the principal termini.

But the Dirkes were still in town and thither Dora Chesney sped one baking afternoon of July.

She found Lady Mary sitting at her high satin-wood bureau, cool and unmoved by the fierce heat without, issuing invitations for a final dinner-party.

With a sigh of relief after the outer glare, Dora threw herself back in the chintz-covered chair, burying her tired face in the big bowl of roses beside her to wait until her cousin's writing should come to an end.

After a minute Lady Mary sealed the last envelope and gathering the letters in her hand rang for the man to send them to the post.

"This one by hand," she added; "if Galton is busy, ring up a messenger."

It was her daily letter to Derrick Kilmarney.

"And now, my dear," she said to the waiting girl as the door closed on the footman. "You must forgive a busy woman! Let us hear all your news."

Dora laughed pleasantly.

"There's very little, I'm afraid, except that I'm

not leaving London just yet; Mrs. Carthuse has asked me to stay with her."

She looked up at Lady Mary slyly with a little heightening of colour.

"I'm so glad. She's your 'Squire's' aunt, isn't she? Oh, Dora, I do hope you are going to be wise. He seems such a nice fellow!"

"If he weren't so dull——" said the girl plaintively—"sometimes I feel I really *can't*!"

"My dear chill, you're too particular. You should think of Kitty too—it's not fair. I think you have no right to miss such an excellent chance."

She looked at her cousin searchingly.

"Someone has been meddling," she thought to herself and out aloud,

"Think what a comfort it would be to your mother—with five of you on her hands."

The girl's face clouded.

"That's just it, Mary—I suppose I must. I know it's silly but I can't forget Jack."

Lady Mary wisely refrained from comment.

"Have you had some tea?" she put her hand on the bell.

But Dora checked her.

"Thanks, yes. I went to see Candida Clifton."

If she had been less absorbed by her own affairs she could hardly have failed to notice the other's start of surprise.

"Candida—who?" Her voice betrayed her curiosity and Dora raised her eyes.

"Mrs. Clifton—you know, wife of the man who writes. They were on the yacht with us and she asked me to come and see her when I got to town. She's one of the sweetest women I ever met—and so original!—and pretty too. A perfect dear," she wound up with enthusiasm.

"They joined you at Marseilles, didn't they?" The voice was careless but Lady Mary was thinking hard, and at the girl's reply her hidden excitement grew.

"Only Mr. Clifton. Candida was at Amalfi or Castellamare, I forget which—we landed him at Naples and picked them both up on our return after our week in the Greek Isles."

"Candida"—"Amalfi;" the coincidence was complete. Lady Mary rose to her feet, her face a little pale. She must think—have time to think.

"Will you excuse me a minute if I run down to the telephone? There is a message I have forgotten."

Dora, accustomed to her busy moods, nodded lazily from the luxury of the deep armchair.

As the former passed down the broad staircase the thoughts were racing through her brain, the links joining in the chain of circumstances.

It had come, this dreaded crisis and the fear that she had thrust from her so resolutely.

"Candida" was a living fact, a very flesh and blood creation.

Never before had Derrick Kilmarny seemed so utterly desirable. All her old love, suffocated under the pall of religious duty was stirring it to life again, intensified by the presence of a rival and the knowledge of her own still more insidious foe—the hand of Time.

She stood before the telephone thinking hard in the long dim dining-room.

Before all else came the feminine desire to see the woman herself—to meet this "Candida" face to face and know the worst.

She mapped out her plans quickly. Dor's friendship should be the link between them.

She must act, for her own peace of mind, and that quickly.

Her eyes fell on the telephone and sitting down she rang up a number and when the reply came,

"Are you Day's Library?" she asked. Then clearly in her soft slow voice,

"Have you a new book by Geoffrey Clifton?" And as they answered in the affirmative, adding the title,

"Please send it me at once. I am Lady Mary Dirke—you have the address," and placed the receiver on the rest.

Back in the boudoir, she excused herself gaily, full of attention for the useful go-between.

"No, you're not to go," she said, "I haven't heard half your news—we were talking about the Cliftons. Where do they live? and what is he like? His new book is so charming, 'Spain from a literary standpoint.' I have always wanted to meet him!"

"I am sure they would be delighted," said Dora warmly, "they know so few people—it is very dull for Candida—they have only lately come to town, you know."

"Unfortunately the season is nearly over," said Lady Mary doubtfully. She did not wish to appear too eager—even to Dora Chesney. "We are off soon, you see, and I have so little time for calls. Don't forget, bye the bye, you are booked to us on the 25th—my last dinner before we leave."

Dora's face fell at the words. "The 25th! Why I thought it was next Thursday; and I'm only going to Mrs. Carthuse for a week," she hesitated—"that makes it the 23rd. I'm afraid, Mary, I shan't be in town."

"What a pity! Shotover and his sister are

coming and I know you like them—it's quite an informal affair——"

She broke off with a little exclamation.

"Happy thought!—why not ask Mrs. Clifton to put you up for the week-end and I will invite them too. They know the Shotovers, and you can explain matters—you say she is unconventional. Go and see her and take my cards."

Dora jumped at the idea, loth to return to the dull country vicarage.

"That would be excellent—it is good of you, Mary. You're sure you don't mind? Mrs. Clifton's lunching with me to-morrow at my club and I'm sure she'll be delighted. Anyhow I'll ring you up afterwards and let you know. And now I *must* be off—so good-bye, my dear."

They kissed each other affectionately and Lady Mary—apparently prey to an afterthought—added with a smile—"Say nothing before Julian, though. He does not like my doing unconventional things. Nor Mr. Kilmarney either, if you meet him, or it is sure to get round!"

She patted the girl's arm.

"Men are such gossips!" she laughed but as the door closed behind her cousin the mask of mirth fell from her face and she stood there staring grimly up at the Irishman's photograph that, carefully placed with others, crowned the high bureau.

"A little surprise for you, my friend," she said, under her breath, and into her narrow heavy-lidded eyes there crept that growing hatred that the name of "Candida" evoked.

Meanwhile the object of her thoughts was standing in the drawing-room that overlooked Regent's Park, arranging a bowl of flowers.

The room, filled with uninteresting modern furniture was yet relieved from utter deariness by bright dashes of colour that Candida had managed to introduce—the touch of originality that marked the artistic temperament of the girl fighting against heavy odds.

Now as she placed her treasured Nankin bowl with its mass of deep red roses against a faded background of Eastern embroidery, an offering that Newcomen had but lately sent her from some Turkish bazaar, her delicate face was lit up with a sense of pleasure that the roses in themselves had failed to achieve.

For they were a tribute from Geoffrey Clifton.

With one of those strange freaks that Fate delights in, love had awakened in his withered heart at last; stirred into life by his wife's presence after the solitary winter of work and strengthened by the sharp goad of jealousy.

Convinced in his own mind that he had been an unwilling witness, in that far-away Castellamare vineyard to a so-called "lover's parting"—though to do him justice he acquitted Candida of any real blame in the matter—the mere fact of Newcomen's obvious admiration had raised in Geoffrey Clifton the primitive passion of possession and awakened him to the fact that the child he had married out of a double sense of duty and decorum had developed into a beautiful and fascinating woman.

So a plumber, left a "Corot," thrusts it into a dark corner until the day when a passing artist trades for it at a price!

Thus the affection, which would have meant all the world to her starved heart in the early years of her married life and saved Candida in all probability from the chance of danger outside, was now

lavished upon the girl too late and roused instead of an answering love a sentiment nearly approaching horror and annoyance.

She was still under the influence of another man and despite the fierce pride with which she drove his name time after time from her very thoughts, the flesh, weaker than the spirit that upheld her, revolted hourly against Geoffrey Clifton's proximity.

Moreover, despite the radiant wear her health had been far from good.

Now and again the change in his disturbed the man.

She was no longer the inconsequential laughing girl who had so seriously interfered with his studious seclusion.

She was a woman, swiftly-matured by sorrow, strengthened in some mysterious way by a force she was yet to fathom.

Once in a sudden spasm of secret jealousy that the present from Newcomen had stirred, without his wife's knowledge he had questioned old Susan narrowly about their wanderings abroad.

The interim in her service of her young mistress troubled him greatly and when she launched forth into praises of the kindly sailor who had brought her the first definite news from Sorrento after the eruption, he had silenced her chatter petulantly with a dull pain at his heart, redoubling his attentions to the shrinking girl.

Although, so far, he had held firmly to the terms of their unnatural marriage-agreement there were days when, with her new knowledge of mankind, she dreaded his steadily-increasing affection and her one desire was to escape from his society.

She snatched feverishly at the chance of avoiding

the inevitable evening tête-à-tête; so that the proposal nervously laid before her by Dora Chesney on the day following her visit to Lady Mary Dirke met with her unqualified approval.

The presence of the young girl in the house would be a check on Geoffrey Clifton's advances and the prospect of meeting the well-known politician and his wife would introduce a new element into the dangerous monotony of their days.

Kilmarny had carefully abstained from all mention of Lady Mary and the possibility of meeting him never even crossed her mind.

Again it was to be a brief respite snatched from fate; a moment to breathe peacefully and store her courage for the inevitable day of shame and humiliation.

To a smaller-minded woman the loophole Clifton himself unconsciously offered her in this strange new-born passion of middle-age would have proved a strong temptation.

But never once did Candida falter in her resolve—even in the dark hours of the night, when she lay shuddering to watch for the lonely dawn.

She would be true to herself again, true to the old childish ideals.

Come what may there should be no more juggling with the truth!

CHAPTER XIX

"It's about time you married, Derry."

The old Baronet dug his stick viciously into a crack of the paved terrace, unearthing a diminutive weed.

It was by no means the first allusion to the subject and Derrick looked up with a frown from where he sat—the spaniel be'ween his knees—searching in its outstretched paw for an imaginary thorn.

He patted the dog's head before answering his grandfather and reassured it gently.

"There's nothing there, old fellow, it's all humbug." Then turning to Sir George, he smiled.

"I'm really too busy at present to think of such a trifle."

The old man chuckled.

"An ever-ready excuse! It's not that you'll be wanting."

He stared across the valley at the haze-wreathed hills beyond.

"All the same," he added slowly, "I'd like—to have known her—before I go."

"Oh, come now!" Derrick laughed pleasantly. "You're not as old as that, sir, by a long way. Why, 'pon my word, I think you're younger than ever, each time I come back to the dear old place."

His voice softened as his eyes roamed lovingly over

the park below, across the sweep of wide terraces to the stretch of gleaming water, where the fine old trees that fringed it were mirrored in the oily depths.

A little red-brown dot beyond the plantation he could see a gable of the dower-house peeping, and instinctively it took him back to boyhood's days and half-forgotten memories.

Meanwhile Sir George was turning over the compliment in his mind.

"We take a bit of killing, the older generation," he admitted grimly. "Johnstone-Biggs, for instance," and the keen eyes gleamed under his bushy brows.

Derrick laughed lazily at the name. For it was that of the present member for the neighbouring town and it was his illness and possible retirement that had hastened Derrick's departure from the South.

Since then his rival had apparently renewed his lease of life and his extraordinary recovery had been a never-failing weapon in Sir George's hand to tease the impatient aspirant to his seat. But now he was on his favourite hobby.

"We had more respect for our constitutions in our time than the young man of to-day—more open air, more exercise, more——"

"Port?" said Derrick, twinkling.

But Sir George was not to be done.

"Exactly," he admitted, "and better heads to carry it than your round-backed Piccadilly loafer with his hat jammed on the narrow nape of his neck and his coats cut in at the waist—bah!" he rose to his feet heavily.

"Come and look at the horses again—there's that chestnut mare I'd like you to see——"

Derrick sprang up with alacrity. The dreaded

subject was dropped and for the next hour they wandered happily round the stables, deeply engrossed in their occupants.

From over the paddock rails, the wise old head of Sambo, now a hardened pensioner, surveyed the pair and it was with a genuine sigh of regret as they came back to the house that Derrick saw the dogcart at the door, waiting to take him to the station.

"Better stay another night," his grandfather suggested. "I don't see too much of you nowadays."

"Wish I could!" a slight line came between the young man's brows. "I'm dining out though—an old promise"—he hesitated for the fraction of a second—"at the Dirke's," he concluded.

Sir George looked straight ahead.

"And how's her Ladyship?" he asked carelessly.

Derrick at the back of the dogcart fidgeted over the strap of his bag.

"Rather sick of the season, I think—it's been a long one and very hot."

He took a deep breath of the sweet country air, suddenly realising the freshness by contrast.

"She would find it so," said his grandfather courteously: "and Dirke?"

"Dead-beat—but he sticks to his guns, as ever."

"I'm sorry for the man; the burden he carries is too big for one pair of shoulders."

"That's about it." Derrick nodded with his foot on the step. "I'll tell him you asked after him, and Lady Mary too."

"Yes, do. Good-bye."

The carriage swung round the drive.

"Damn her!" said the old man slowly. He stood for a moment gazing through the dwindling cloud of dust.

Then pulling himself together he called the spaniel to heel, and heavily erect, turned into the lonely house.

London, as Derrick had predicted, was stifling with a thundery heat a thousandfold more trying than real sunshine.

He dressed leisurely, the windows and doors open, vaguely upset by the coming storm and a prey to sudden depression.

Somewhat moodily he wondered who would be there.

Lady Mary had mentioned Dora's engagement as the motive for the evening. She was to bring the people with whom she was staying and the Shot-overs were coming.

"A family party," she had said with an inward irony he little realised, and added, "I hope you won't be bored."

He frowned as he stood there waiting for his hansom.

For his visit to Sir George had been in the nature of an escape.

On Friday for the first time since the rupture of their old relations he had himself stepped across the dividing line, and yielding to a sudden temptation, half impulse, half force of habit, he had taken Lady Mary in his arms and kissed her defiantly.

There had been no time for a scene—no time for an explanation. A kindly Fate (as he had afterwards apostrophised it!) had flooded the room with callers and he had discreetly retired.

Sooner or later, he knew, it was bound to happen.

Candida had passed out of his life as mysteriously as she had entered, leaving a blank he tried in vain to fill.

With her intimate knowledge of his temperament

and even of his secret passion, Lady Mary was too clever a woman to miss the chance of catching him "at the rebound."

He was no more to blame for that sudden kiss than the puppet in the play; he was not his own master.

His hansom pulled up before the familiar door with a brougham in its wake and he stood for a moment fumbling for his change in the clear evening light.

"There's Derrick Kilmarney," said Dora in the waiting carriage, turning a mischievous face towards Geoffrey Clifton's austere one. "He's Mary's pet crocodile, you know."

There was a sudden movement beside her, but she did not notice it as her host repeated her words blankly.

"Pet crocodile?"

"Well—'tame cat' if you like!—only I think my word's prettier. Oh!"

A flash of lightning flickered across the sullen sky.

"I knew we were going to have a storm. Do let's get into the house."

The rain started in big single drops and at last the brougham moved forward—far too fast for Candida, whose brain was in a whirl.

But Dora's idle words were to prove the stimulant against her first spasm of weakness.

They were to meet—face to face at last.

Her feelings raced each other tumultuously. Overwhelming joy succeeded fear and was swept aside in turn by pride.

"Mary's tame cat."

So he was *that* as well as the man who had wrecked her life! And a desperate courage struggled up to meet the blow—the fine-drawn heroism

of a sensitive nature that strings its unruly nerves to obedience.

She would shew him again, as once before she had shewn him in the half-sinking boat, that she was mistress of herself.

There was a little delay in the cloak-room ; a torn flounce on Dora's dress needed a stitch and Candida thanked heaven for the momentary breathing-space to subdue the colour that the unexpected shock had brought to her delicate face.

She gave one final look at the glass and even to herself admitted the charm of the answering reflection.

For her sombre violet dress threw into strong relief the exquisitely-moulded shoulders where the blue veins shewed under the transparent skin ; her red-gold hair, dressed high, was bound with an antique fillet of amethysts that made her blue eyes bluer and accentuated the fact that she wore no other jewel that night—only her air of youth and that perfect vitality that is in itself the very diamond of life.

"Mrs. Clifton—Mr. Derrick Kilmarney."

It was over !

Somewhere from leagues away Candida heard her own voice speaking, low and smooth,

"But we are quite old friends."

She looked him steadily in the face.

Unlike herself, he was unprepared for the meeting and for a moment the mask fell and those relentless eyes watching the pair saw the fierce hunger leap up in her lover's face. Then,

"This is very delightful," he said unsteadily. "All the more so for being unexpected."

The mask slid back again with an effort. He turned to Lady Mary.

"It is always so nice to meet old friends," he added.

But she was not deceived.

This was "Candida"—Candida herself.

"That is capital," she answered pleasantly, "and you are to take Mrs. Clifton down. Lord Shotover"—she moved across the room, pairing her guests—"dinner is quite ready; shall we shew them the way?"

Another flash of lightning flickered through the windows and the thunder rolled silently.

"At last," said Derrick under his breath.

Candida laid the lightest hand upon his proffered arm.

"We are fated to meet in storms," she told him calmly.

At the turn of the stairs she saw her husband—Shotover's sister for partner—turn his head anxiously with a swift upward glance for his wife.

A sudden insane desire to laugh stole up into her throat; then with a new-born touch of cruelty she nodded her head gaily in Geoffrey Clifton's direction.

A look of relief stole into the thin face and glancing sideways under her long lashes she saw the Irishman's eyes wide open with astonishment.

And through it all like a secret thread ran the overmastering sense of joy—that purely physical revolt against pride and cruelty and the comedy she played—the knowledge of his presence that drowned all lesser emotions and sent the blood dancing through her veins and the colour to her eyes.

Never before, in all their most intimate moments had she appeared so utterly charming to the man beside her.

Her very air of dignity and aloofness added a piquancy to the situation and only the knowledge of

his hostess' presence kept him from straying his admiration to the world at large.

But try as he dared she would not be drawn back into the old familiar memories.

Once, under the buzz of conversation he murmured the lines she had loved so well:

"Free of the sleeping town, free of the watchman."

But she checked him with a careless little laugh.

"Walt Whitman, isn't it? I never read poetry now."

She looked at him innocently.

"One is so busy in London," she lied.

But she gave a quick glance at the menu—three more courses before dessert!

"How long, oh Lord, how long?"

Once, as piqued by her steady indifference he asked her boldly for news of the yellow dog, for a moment the table swam before her eyes and a deathly faintness seized her.

He had no right, no right to try her so!

"Dead, I hope." The words slipped out against her will and she tried to regain lost ground—that upper plateau of insouciance.

"Comme tout le reste!" she added lightly.

"That can *never* die!" There was a note of sincerity in his voice and hope sprang up within her heart.

Would he—could he save her still? Had he the courage to play the man?

She stifled the thought resolutely as meeting Lady Mary's eye she rose from the table.

But, once evoked, it haunted her persistently, through all the small-talk and drawn-out conversation in the drawing-room and gathered force afresh as the men trooped into the room.

Could she trust him after all? Did he love her, as he had sworn, "before all the world?"

And in a low even voice she answered Lady Mary's platitudes about her husband's book.

Yes—it was a success. Yes, it had sold well. Oh—a long time—years, in fact; it had been a tedious task. It was very kind of Lady Mary to say so.

Then by a clever twist to Derrick,

Yes—on the Continent—did Lady Mary know the South?

Quite a casual travelling acquaintanceship—she preferred Florence to Rome, etc. She swept into a long-drawn out appreciation of the former.

Lady Mary yawned behind her fan but made no headway.

Not for nothing had Dora's chatter warned her.

"Mary's tame cat"—she would not forget.

So Candida steadily held her own.

And at last her hostess rose with a sense of social duties.

"Your wife is so interesting," she told Geoffrey Clifton, "I could not tear myself away."

And, watching him, she made a further discovery.

"The little bookworm's in love with her too! Quite a bourgeois romance."

She beckoned to Derrick.

"Go and talk to Mrs. Clifton," she whispered, "there's a dear boy."

He winced as though she had flicked him with a whip and looking down into her cold face he marvelled how he had ever dreamed of kissing it.

Candida was standing by the open window; the storm had passed, leaving wet pavements and clear evening sky.

Over the trees of the square a star glimmered brightly.

"It seems so out of place," said Candida, "as if it had got into London by mistake."

For a moment she dropped her armour of light frivolity.

"I expect it hates the lamps and glare and wishes itself back in the quiet sleeping country!"

Derrick, recognising the old mood, felt his pulses quicken.

"There's another star," he answered gently, "behind that tallest tree. It won't be lonely now. In an hour or two they'll be laughing together as the lamps pale out and die."

He took a step forward on to the balcony.

"It's quite dry—the air's delicious after the storm."

And he held the curtain back for her to pass.

A sudden memory of the terrace in far away Amalfi swung up into his brain and by the sixth sense was transferred to hers, as they stood there silently looking out across the trees.

"It only needs the sea." His voice was low and again the silence grew.

Someone in the drawing-room behind began to ring.

It was Dora, obediently airing her sole accomplishment.

"Vous avez beau faire et beau dire. ."

Derrick bent his head and whispered; but she drew herself away.

"You failed me," she said, "failed me utterly!"

He broke out into vehement expostulation.

It had been impossible to come: his work had claimed him inexorably; his whole future had hung upon it! Surely she would understand and forgive,

and pity too. He had been so lonely, had missed her so!

The Irish voice was broken—

"For the sake of our old love—for the golden, sunny days."

"I prayed you to come, by all you held most dear—and you failed me."

She turned away, gazing far out over the square.

He answered her hotly,

"You gave me no chance of explaining—you shut the door in my face—and now that we meet at last——"

He stopped with a quick gesture of despair.

"Why did you not come?" Despite herself, her voice pleaded.

"I couldn't. Besides, I knew the reason, you see——"

There was a quick rustle and she swung round breathless, facing him.

"You *knew*?"

Her action was so dramatic that his face shewed his surprise and again she threw the challenge down.

"You *knew*—and you didn't come?"

"I knew your husband was on Shotover's yacht—that he might turn up at any moment."

"Oh *that*!" she laughed suddenly—almost hysterically, he fancied.

"So you thought that was the reason?"

"Was there another?"

She turned away, leaning with both hands on the iron railing, her face averted. From the room within Dora, thankful for the approaching end, raised her voice triumphantly.

"En mourir. . . en mourir!" and a sudden silence reigned.

Some subtle sense of catastrophe warned him and he moved up beside his companion, with anxious eyes.

"Candida—tell me—was there anything else?"

But still she stood there motionless, gazing out over the empty square.

He slipped his hand along the rail until it covered her own and at the beloved touch she turned round slowly, her face grown white, her blue eyes full of tears, full too of a sudden desperate courage.

"I ~~am~~ going to have a child—*your* child," she told him.

CHAPTER XX

The library door was open and as he heard his wife's step on the stairs Geoffrey Clifton turned his head quickly from where he sat in the window at the wide table, with its neat piles of papers and books of reference, methodical and precise like the man himself.

"Candida, is that you?"

She was humming a little tune as she went but at the sound of her husband's call it faded on her lips and a shadow passed across the brightness of her face.

"Yes—do you want me?" Her voice was irresolute; then, as he answered nothing but sat there patiently waiting, she crossed the hall and entered the studious-looking room.

The sunshine from the window fell full upon her where she stood, intensifying the richness of her hair under her wide black hat and her blue eyes seemed bluer for the colour that tinged her cheeks and the faint air of excitement that clung around her.

She was dressed for the street in a simple muslin gown of deep toned blue, relieved from utter severity by a vandyked collar of lace, rolled back to show the firm white throat and caught together by a quaint old clasp of pearls.

Round her shoulders she had drawn a black mantilla, knotted loosely and falling with long ends to her feet, and the whole sombre effect threw into strong relief the purity of her skin and the gleaming lights and shades of her wonderful hair.

He looked up at her silently, opening and shutting his pencil-case with a nervous gesture she invariably connected with his presence.

"What is it?" she asked, a shade impatiently and her eyes wandered to the clock, away from the thin colourless face. "I promised to meet Dora at three and I haven't too much time already!"

He lowered his gaze to the letter before him.

"It's nothing—" he stumbled in his speech—"that is—n-nothing very pressing—only about our arrangements for the summer. I have been thinking——"

But she broke in hurriedly.

"Oh! if that's all, I don't *want* to go away! not so soon again;" she checked her vehemence with a little deprecatory laugh. "Why, we've only just come back," she urged.

He looked up in surprise, and, vexed with herself, she turned away out of the stream of sunshine and bent her head over the buttoning of her glove.

"I thought you said you were tired of London? On several occasions I seem to remember your complaining of the heat and dust."

He spoke with a precise astonishment and she racked her brains for a reply.

She could not tell him that her meeting with Derrick Kilmarney had changed her point of view or of the hope that had raised her out of the slough of despair and made the parched London pavements enchanted ground to her feet.

He watched her furtively, conscious of thoughts

he could not fathom; conscious too of the picture she made against the dark background of his books with her air of youth that hurt him at times by very force of contrast.

"It's so hard to know where to go," she admitted at last clutching at the first plausible excuse that occurred to her. "The average seaside place is hardly worth the labour of packing."

A sudden smile parted her lips as her mind, chained to the one idea, flashed up a picture from the past and she saw in that far-away Sorrento sick-room Derrick, in despair, kneeling on her overflowing trunk, vainly struggling to secure it.

Misled by her expression her husband gave a little dry laugh of assent.

"In the main I agree with you; but if that is the only trouble"—a note of pride crept into his voice—"I think I may justly say I have solved the question."

She took a step nearer, genuinely alarmed and conscious of a definite move on his part.

"Then—it's settled?" she asked and again her eyes flew to the clock and back again, anxiety visible in her face. "I *must* be off—do be quick, Geoffrey!"

He looked up at her tantalisingly, glad of the chance of holding her interest if only for the moment.

"I think I shall keep it a secret;" he smiled and nodded his head where the scanty gray hairs showed remorselessly in the sunshine—"anyhow for the present."

Then, as her face clouded over, he added quickly, "I will give you the probable date of our departure if you like."

"Well?" the word rapped out in her impatience.

"The 9th," he told her gravely; "we shall be off on the 9th, you and I and Susan, and perhaps two other servants—or they could go down the day before."

"Two other servants! It's a house then?"

Consternation was written largely on her face. "You've taken a house—a furnished house somewhere?"

"Exactly."

"I think you might have consulted my wishes in the matter!"

But he only smiled mysteriously.

"I think—somehow—I have! I do not anticipate disappointment on your part."

With one of his abrupt movements, buoyed up by his secret triumph, he laid his hand upon her arm, but as she felt his touch she drew back quickly and the colour rose to her face.

Then, as his hand dropped like a stone, and she saw the painful tightening of his mouth, a sudden unaccustomed wave of pity swept over her and, with an effort, she stooped and touched his forehead lightly with her lips.

"I am sure it is all right;" she was halfway across the room by now. "Don't forget to answer Lord Shotover's invitation. Good-bye," and she was gone.

As the door closed behind her he still sat there like a man in a dream gazing out into the sunshine.

Many a time as a child had she kissed him thus; but to-day, with the letter before him it brought an unusual significance.

Once he put his hand up to his brow, feeling still the touch of the soft young mouth, and a smile broke suddenly across his tired face, as his thoughts ran onward.

He would have her "to himself," down by the quiet sea; away from the stress and noise of town, with all the old associations.

The little gabled house with its sloping, lichened roof rose up before his eyes, at the end of the winding lane where the high hedge reared its ragged boughs against the deep blue sky; and beneath, the violets and primroses she had loved to gather as a girl were dotted about the mossy banks.

In the old Devonshire home, to start life anew, "Our *married* life," he breathed.

Meanwhile Candida, feverish with the hope that had sprung into birth on that memorable evening at Lady Mary's house was making her way towards the meeting-place that Derrick had arranged.

She followed his directions carefully, but it was not without a touch of nervousness that she found herself gazing at Van Hier's snowstorms and mist, in the narrow Jermyn Street window.

"How do you do?" said a voice gaily behind her, "now who would have thought of meeting *you* to-day?"

She turned quickly, looking into the familiar face, subconsciously stung by the careless words of greeting, but speedily reassured by the light in the deep brown eyes.

"You *dear!*" he whispered the words under his breath, as a pair of men sauntered down towards them, and quick to take the hint she returned to her study of the pictures.

"Doesn't that snowstorm look absurdly cool?—it's quite refreshing in the midst of all this heat and glare. Don't you think so, Mr. Kilmarney?"

Her voice and face were demure; for the swift joy of his presence was gaining upon her and the game

of make-believe appealed to her sense of mischief. And in response there arose in the man the memory of those sunny Capri days and the laughing face that had caught him unaware over the crumbling wall.

The men passed with an indifferent glance at the pair and for the moment the street was empty.

"My rooms are just as cool," he suggested. "Come and see."

But Candida frowned.

"Isn't it rather"—she paused, uncertain of her words—"rather a foolish thing to do?—for *both* of us, I mean."

Her evident care for him touched a new chord in Derrick and for a moment he hesitated too. Then, brushing aside her objections; "Where else can we talk in peace? If you'll only come at once, there's no one about."

Noting her indecision his voice went suddenly grave.

"It's no good, Candida, you must trust me altogether—now, or not at all!"

He hed back with all her old spirit.

"I found you so absolutely reliable in the past."

Despite himself he winced.

"I suppose you think I deserved that?"

Then as she did not answer he made a move in the direction of his rooms. "Anyhow I certainly don't think it wise for you to dawdle here."

Without further demur she fell into step beside him and after a few paces stopped before the narrow entrance.

He swung the door back quickly and with a hasty glance around they stole like a pair of thieves noiselessly up the staircase.

On the second floor he checked her by a gesture and drawing out his key, let himself into his flat.

Then, as she stood there within the narrow passage, "Straight ahead," he whispered, and turning, shot the bolt home behind him, with a quick sigh of relief.

Candida walked forward into the sitting-room which as he had prophesied was cool and shady, its big windows wide open showing the unexpected green of a tree—pathetic relic of ancient days in the disused churchyard that lies in cynical contrast under the gay shadow of Prince's Restaurant.

She sank down into one of the big armchairs that flanked the fireplace with a sudden sensation of restfulness and her eyes wandered round the littered room full of that peculiar bachelor atmosphere that a woman's light touch so quickly destroys.

On the little table beside her a pair of soiled white gloves lay cheek by jowl with a formidable blue-book and the crumpled morning paper, an open pen-knife and half-cleaned pipe completed the disorder. With a quick throb of pleasure she realised her own photograph on the secretary, propped against the telephone instrument, in a battered silver frame.

And the sense of being in the very heart of his life, that subtle influence of his daily presence, that emanated from every scattered trifle that he had touched, swept over her sensitive spirit like a great overwhelming wave.

Even as she rebelled against this weakening of her sternly-conceived plan of resistance the man himself was there before her, his face alight with passion, his brown eyes full of love.

"At last!" the words broke from his lips and the next minute he was kneeling at her feet, his arm thrown round her where she lay in the deep armchair, his hot face buried in her lap.

"Candida," he breathed. "Candida."

For one moment the sweetness of it overpowered her.

The next, fortified by the very suffering she had endured through him, she drew herself away.

"Please get up"—her steady voice surprised herself. "If you behave like this, I shall have to go."

And as he raised a startled face to gaze at her she added that inevitable appeal to his honour that is a woman's strongest weapon.

"I am in your power," she told him slowly, letting each word sink into his understanding, "therefore I am sure you will respect my wishes."

He sprang to his feet and walked away from her to the open window, too mortified to speak—whilst she lay back in the armchair with a stifled gasp of relief.

The battle had been hard, harder than Derrick ever imagined, in that room that cried aloud his ownership, with the flood of memories his own presence evoked.

"Derry." Her voice was gentle, but still he stared out across the shady graveyard, calling himself bitterly a fool—a precipitate fool to have started by arousing her apprehension. And the very fact of his precipitancy opened his eyes to the strength of his desire.

He *could* not let her go!

What was to be done? Had she been a free woman he was in the mood in which a man, as the last resource, proposes marriage; accepting fatalistically the only solution open, still with the normal side of his reason believing wedlock the death-bed of love and passion.

"Derry." Again the clear, well-remembered voice. "I did not mean to hurt you." There was

the rustle of her dress as she crossed the room to his side and the banal fact of the open window brought him back into the cold land of reason.

"You mustn't stand here," he said. "You might be seen."

The sight of her white face moved him.

"Forgive me," he said, "I—didn't understand."

She gave a sigh of relief. The heavy tension was broken and with feminine cleverness she unmasked her last battery.

"I'm not very fit just now," her voice trembled—"I can't stand—much."

He gave her an anxious glance, and, master of himself, he drew the armchair forward and placed a cushion in it.

"Do sit down," he answered remorsefully. "What a brute you must think me! Look here"—his face brightened—"I'll make you a cup of tea."

She jumped at the suggestion, foreseeing an outlet for his restless activity.

"Do—that would be heavenly," and pleased at the thought he left the room.

Through the open door she could hear him filling the kettle in the bathroom adjoining and something of the old domestic happiness of Amalfi days stole into her lonely heart.

In a few minutes he re-appeared, balancing a tray with all the paraphernalia of a picnic-hamper for two.

"I got one—just like yours—the minute I got back to civilisation. It's my weakness, you know—at least one of them," he laughed with the old careless ring, "a good cup of tea; I ought to have been an old maid."

Despite herself Candida smiled.

"What an excellent one you would have been—a pattern to the neighbourhood!"

"Of Jermyn Street you mean?" He stooped down and lit the little lamp and they both laughed.

He drew the lace curtains across the window and demanding a pin secured them carefully; then, despite her protestations, wheeled her up into the cool current of air and not until she had drunk her first cup of tea did he allow the conversation to drift back to serious topics.

But as he saw the colour again in her pretty face and realised that her strained attitude of defence had vanished, he squared his shoulders resolutely and started.

"Now I want to hear everything: all your life since that centuries-ago day we said good-bye at Amalfi."

And slowly the story unfolded itself, gathering impetus as Candida lost herself in the sheer pleasure of his unswerving attention.

Once he interrupted her at the name of Newcomen.

"It's odd," he said, "I was going to tell you. I fancy your husband dislikes our friend; he questioned me with quite unnecessary curiosity about the man—that night at the Dirkes, I mean, after you had left the room. But I didn't want to interrupt; please go on, dear."

"I don't think they ever met," said Candida thoughtfully, "but since you mention it I remember he's always running down the navy and naval men—perhaps that's the secret of his aversion."

And she took up the thread again.

Something in the simple way she narrated the story touched her listener deeply and when she came to the dark days of knowledge and despair

when the future seemed to black to face he gave a little exclamation of pity and horror combined and the question broke from his lips,

"But doesn't your husband know?"

Her eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"My husband?" she faltered.

Derrick frowned in his perplexity.

"He wouldn't surely mind your having a child! He's no rooted objection to children, has he? I don't see the point of such secrecy—it's bound to come out some day and how should he guess?"

He searched for his words, his eyes averted, and at last, "He'd think it his own—wouldn't he?"

His voice was low and reluctant. He hated to think of the husband. It was a blow to romance—it involved his own freedom of action—his right to love the woman before him.

But Candida lost all these minor points in her excitement as the light flashed in upon her, the secret of her lover's extraordinary calm.

"Don't you understand? it's impossible! He—he isn't my husband, you know, except in name," her voice was desperate. "That's all."

"Good Lord!" Derrick sprang to his feet as the truth rose up before him.

"Then—then he'd know—the child wasn't!"

Words failed him.

They stared at each other for a moment in silence.

"I told you," said Candida, "in my letter at Capri." Then into his troubled brain there flashed the lines,

"Love did not enter into the arrangement. It was like exchanging one parent for another."

He had dismissed it later as a childish exaggeration, and the subject, never reopened in their tacit

agreement to avoid all mention of the husband's name, had lain buried between them.

He felt himself stunned under the shock of the revelation.

This was worse—far worse than he had ever imagined.

And knowing this, how she must have suffered—alone in her despair!

"Oh, my poor little girl!" his voice choked, "I never knew—believe me. What *must* you have thought?"

He was bending over her now, speechless with remorse. For once his facile eloquence had deserted him and this more than anything else told the woman before him how deeply he was moved.

With the generosity that held so large a part in her nature she laid her little hand gently over his.

"Never mind," she whispered, "I suppose—I should have—got through—somehow."

He leaned his head on the back of the deep arm-chair and a groan broke from his lips.

But Candida, at the sound, wheeled round, every resolution snapped at the sight of his distress; conscious too of the healing wounds, the merciful touch of tender fingers on her soul.

"Don't cry, Derry darling—I can't bear it—it's all right now—now you've come back to me." Her arms crept round his neck.

And the blessed tears fell and mixed, washing away sin and its heavy expiation, leaving the finer love, bought by deep suffering and hungry for atonement.

After a little, he sat down on the arm of her chair, one hand tightly clasped in hers, his voice still shaken but full of a new resolution, as he mapped out the future before them; that future that should

indeed prove to her what his steady love was worth.

How they would go to that golden land she had dreamed of in far Capri, and leaving sorrow and shame behind, live a life of fair love and companionship, with the child their love had raised.

Candida, tired but deeply content, lay back in the low armchair, freed from the intolerable weight of that daily duplicity her soul so loathed, and that other poignant horror that had faced her of late in her husband's disturbing manner. But above all else the consciousness that her lover had proved himself—that he could throw aside worldly prospects and every ambition before the double call of duty and love—that glowed in her heart and compensated fully for the past.

But even as she sat there lulled by his tender voice, wholly trustful, happy at last, there came an interruption from the world without; a knocking at the door of the flat.

She started nervously but Derrick reassured her.

"It's all right, dear—no one can come in. The door's locked—don't be frightened!"

He laid his hand lovingly on her shoulder. "Sit still—they'll go away soon."

But the knock came again—a double one—then silence.

He breathed a sigh of relief.

"It's only a wire—I'll go and fetch it."

She sank back in the chair, watching her lover's quick movements as he walked down the passage, opened the door and taking in the telegram dismissed the boy.

He tore the envelope open and came back into the light to read; and a sudden anxiety, a strange presentiment of evil, swept over Candida as she watched his face.

He whistled softly under his breath and his brows contracted with thought.

"What is it?" she asked anxiously, "not bad news, Derry?"

"N-no—not exactly." He crossed the room and laid the open sheet upon her knee.

"Read it," he said. It was from the old Baronet, terse and to the point.

"Johnstone-Biggs died second stroke twelve to-day."

CHAPTER XXI

To every strong stroke of life's pendulum there comes the inevitable backward swing, and to emotional natures the reaction follows more swiftly than to the unimpressible.

In all sincerity Derrick had vowed to make atonement for the sorrow and shame he had brought upon the innocent girl of Capri days, and in the heat of his enthusiasm, ambition had seemed but a small matter in proportion to his love.

But this cold touch of realism—this removal of the one great obstacle to his success—opened his eyes as nothing else could have done to the magnitude of the sacrifice he contemplated.

In the golden romance of that sunny exile with the woman he believed he so dearly loved, social ostracism and the blighting of his political prospects had failed to daunt him, but he had forgotten one other side to the affair which now he could not with equanimity overlook—the effect of his conduct on his grandfather.

It would break the old man's heart.

Paralysed at the immediate consequences of eloping with another man's wife, Derrick's loyalty snatched at the excuse and accused him of rank egoism.

For some time past the very brilliancy of his

reasoning powers had gradually led him into a state of passive self-deception and to find a legitimate reason for avoiding a course he disliked was fast becoming an integral part of his character.

The temptation to temporise was irresistible.

He knew the generosity of Candida's nature and it was easy to gain her ready sympathy for the lonely, childless old man, his whole life wrapped up in his grandson's welfare.

Graphically he drew a sketch of Sir George.

A fighter by instinct, this election was to have been his last great battle into which he would throw himself with all the bull-dog tenacity of his nature.

Many a time together had they studied the coming campaign and no sturdier canvasser could the younger man have desired.

Now at the first call to arms there was nothing to face but an ignoble retreat.

Candida listened anxiously, a tightening at her heart, as she realised to the full the depths of Derrick's despair.

He rambled on into details of the political situation, whilst she sat there, thinking hard.

"It's happened just in time—this death, I mean, for the party. We're close upon the recess; a fortnight later and there'd have been endless delays. Now they'll hurry up the nomination. Dirke will see to that——"

He broke off suddenly.

"It's no good talking—I shall throw my bomb into the camp at once."

Despite himself he sighed.

"Supposing"—Candida watched his face—"supposing we waited—a little?"

He could not quench the light that sprang up in his eyes, albeit with tightened lips he shook his head.

Her courage rose at the sight and that supreme instinct of loving womanhood—the primitive force of self-immolation—drove her to her fate.

"Would two months see you through?"

He looked at her in open wonder, totally unaware of the magnitude of her offering.

But Candida knew.

Two months more in the daily dread of discovery. Eight long weeks of unceasing self-defence at the mercy of her husband's growing importunity!

Could she stand it? She gripped the arms of the chair, a smile upon her face.

But Derrick grasped at the straw.

"Less than that—with any luck."

"Very well," she said, "I will wait."

He looked at her with a curiously reverent admiration, still mixed with wonder.

Only just now her one desire had been for immediate action.

How difficult women were to understand!

"You really wish it?"

She nodded her head, fearing to trust her voice, and a pause ensued.

Then, slowly, his eyes on the open window, his heart already in the thick of the fight,

"I'll see it through," he pronounced, "for the old man's sake."

And to do him justice he believed the reason sincere.

He rolled the telegram into a ball and threw it into the grate with an anxious glance at his companion; for her silence jarred upon him.

"All the same, I wish the confounded thing had never happened!" She smiled bravely at the typical outburst, and pulling herself together fell to discussing ways and means.

He was to win the election. Oddly enough the thought of failure never crossed her mind. It was to be his public appreciation of his grandfather's generosity—a last feather in the old man's cap—whilst for a little longer Candida should continue the old life of dreary deception by Geoffrey Clifton's side.

Some innate delicacy of thought forbade her from betraying her husband's secret, this strange new-born infatuation of his, to her lover's ears.

Meanwhile they must be cautious—more than ever so, since he would be under the public gaze. He could not afford the slightest hint of scandal. They must meet rarely and exchange but guarded, occasional letters.

Involuntarily Candida shivered, the prison bars closing tightly about her.

For a moment she wondered if it were better that they should never have been reunited; then in the same breath she scorned her want of faith and built new day-dreams to fill the weary interval.

For Derrick the days would be busy enough, full of broad interests and growing excitement. He would exult in displaying his ready gifts of language and that still more personal pride in every "doubting Thomas" brought within the fold.

And for her, meanwhile?

Manlike he ordered "rest"; and in his mind saw her, graceful, delicate, with that aureole of glorious hair outspread on an eternal sofa!

He would carry the picture with him into the heart of battle as knights of old carried their lady's gage.

She laughed softly knowing he meant her well, knowing too that "resting" was not her forte in life!

"I'm much stronger than I look," she told him, "it's the worry lately that has tried me. Otherwise I'm wonderfully well."

"Thank God for that!" his voice was fervent. "When I think of it all, I could——"

But she laid her finger across his lips and at that moment the telephone bell startled them both.

Derrick sprang from the arm of the chair and picking up the receiver, answered.

"Yes—Kilmarny—yes. I had a telegram from Sir George—very well—eight o'clock, I suppose? Thanks very much."

He rang off and turned to Candida.

"It's Dirke," he said, "I'm to dine there to-night and talk things over," he laughed almost boyishly, stirred by his leader's voice. "He's not so confident of the result as you are—says it will be a hard fight."

Candida rose to her feet.

"I'm going," she said, "it's frightfully late—I'd no idea of the time."

He drew her gently into his arms.

"I hate losing you, even for a minute." He stroked back the little untidy curls, holding her face tenderly between his hands. "How pretty you are—and sweet—so *sweet*!"

"Some day," she whispered, "there'll be no more good-byes."

He gazed down into the clear blue eyes, and for a moment the better nature in him stirred, urging him to have done with procrastination and from that hour bravely start life afresh, unhampered by the fetters of ambition. For deep down in his heart he knew that those fetters, once forged, would not so easily be broken.

How could he put his hand to the plough and at the first furrow look back?

But the moment passed as it came, leaving Candida unsuspecting of treachery, happy in the full generosity of her soul, that gave ever more and more into her lover's hands.

He saw her safely into a cab and then returned to his rooms to gather together the disconnected threads of thought.

Free from the glamour of her presence he fell a prey to heavy depression, for he could hardly fail to realise the blackness of the outlook and at once his busy brain set to work to search for the way of escape.

He lit a cigarette and sat down by the open window, his eyes, unseeing, fixed on the patch of green.

That Geoffrey Clifton would divorce her he did not for an instant doubt, believing him still the cold-blooded dreary student she had unconsciously pictured him at Amalfi.

He felt no pity for the husband; he had brought it on himself.

And afterwards? The case would be short, for he would make no defence.

But of marriage they had said no word.

If only there were a means of avoiding this public scandal and disgrace, of hushing it up, of hiding her somewhere far from her husband's eyes.

A sudden memory rose of Tressider, whose secret he had stumbled upon in that far-off Cornish village, where as plain Max Truman the young nobleman found that happiness his social world denied him; and pretty little Mrs. Truman and her fair-haired child lived peacefully in the sleepy trustful haven, their whole lives centred in his fitful and carefully-screened visits.

For the first time the thought of the child took a

definite personal form and he winced as the fact struck home that he would be responsible for its illegitimacy. His own flesh and blood to start life with this brand across its face.

Not even immediate action could wipe out the latter, but marriage could give the child a name—the name his father had borne.

The thought stung like a whip and his whole soul revolted against the sacrifice.

All the old love of freedom surged up in him and blind anger as well at the sense of his folly—his reckless carelessness that had brought such a thing to pass.

Then and there he made his choice.

He would be free—come what may!

The woman should not suffer—but the child? From the depths of his heart he wished it dead as he went in to dress for his dinner with the Dirkes.

CHAPTER XXII

When Professor Manteucchi—that hero of Vesuvian fame—arrived in England for a brief respite from work after the fiery ordeal he had undergone Lord Shotover immediately sought for an introduction.

Deeply interested in all scientific questions, and a member himself of the Royal Society, he had little difficulty in the matter, and the Professor and his medical adviser—who travelled with him, and had in fact persuaded him to visit London—were invited to dine with him a few days following their arrival at the Ritz.

Lord Shotover had asked the Dirkes, but they were leaving town, and disappointed in turn by other departing friends, he fell back on Geoffrey Clifton and two other men and decided to make it a bachelor party and wind up by a box at the Empire.

Dora Chesney had returned to the dismal country vicarage and Candida was alone, planning the move in a few days time down to the old Devonshire house. For her husband had confessed the secret of their summer abode, reserving however the impulse that underlay the scheme, until a more favourable opportunity.

He came in now to say good-night to her where

she sat at the open window, the paper across her lap. She had just read of Derrick's nomination and her thoughts were far away, lost in day-dreams of that golden age they had pictured so fondly together, to be broken sharply by her husband's colourless voice.

"I must be going now," he looked at his watch, "it will take me twenty minutes to get to the Ritz, I suppose?"

"Quite that, I should think."

Her face looked drawn and white and he stood there uncertainly fingering the brim of his hat.

"I don't like leaving you alone."

He played with the spring of his opera hat, opening it a little and shutting it, until, her nerves on edge, she felt inclined to scream.

How she loathed his fidgety ways!

"I'm all right," she said listlessly, "I don't mind being alone." Click, click, click! Would nothing stop him?

"You'll ruin that hat!" Against her will the words slipped out and with a startled glance he apologised.

"I beg your pardon," and added, "you don't look well to-night."

The colour flushed up under her skin.

"It's a headache," she answered quickly, "that's all—I've had it all day. I shall go to bed early."

Mechanically he started to play with the hat again, staring down at her solemnly where he stood. Click . . . click . . . !

"You'll be late," she said in desperation.

Then disconcerted by his steady scrutiny, she forced a smile to her face.

"I hope you'll enjoy it—are you going on anywhere afterwards?"

"The Empire, I believe—I wish we weren't."

He stooped down and kissed her timidly on the forehead; "I'd sooner come home to you," he ventured.

"Oh! you mustn't do that. Lord Shotover would be annoyed and I—" she stammered suddenly, her eyes averted, "I'm awfully tired, I shall go to bed the moment that dinner is over. There's your hansom!" as the jingle of bells and sudden clatter of hoofs outside fell on their ears.

She held out her hand with a little formal gesture prompted by her secret dread.

"Good-night, Geoffrey."

"Good-night," he echoed the words and still staring moodily, for the last time he opened and shut his hat.

Candida dug her nails deep down into the arms of her chair.

"I've half a mind to return after dinner."

Powerless, she sat there, waiting. It was harder to bear than she had even imagined.

"Don't sit up for me, though." He hesitated again, opened his lips as if to speak, coughed the little dry cough she knew so well and, courage failing him, turned and went slowly from the room.

Candida sprang to her feet, her hands pressed tightly to her throbbing head.

"Thank God!"—the words came from her heart—"a moment more and I believe I should have told him everything!" For she was in one of those moods in which the strained nerves are on the verge of revolt and reason takes a mere secondary place in the mental scheme.

She walked out on to the narrow balcony overlooking Regent's Park.

The air was so still, far away she could hear the cry of some animal in the Zoo.

She stood there, straining her ears, trying to place the sound.

Was it a wolf, or hyæna? or perhaps a tiger's discontented whine.

It came again—the low mournful call; and suddenly a sense of loneliness oppressed the listening woman and she longed for the touch of a hand, the sound of a kindly voice, to save her from herself.

And by some subtle instinct of his near approach, her thoughts turned to Newcomen, the steady, warm-hearted sailor, with his strong sympathies and unswerving beliefs.

She heard the door-bell ring, without curiosity, lost in a sudden memory of Castellamare, and when the maid entered the room and announced "Captain Newcomen," it seemed to fit into the picture so evenly that she hardly felt surprise at his unexpected appearance.

"How very nice!" and impulsively she gave him both her hands. "I was just thinking of you."

He shewed in his sunburnt face the keen pleasure her words caused him.

"I ought to apologise," he said, "but I've had a series of accidents. My taxi broke down coming from Waterloo and I got a bus and lost my way and finally walked across the Park. I wanted to ask you and your husband to dine to-night, and now," he glanced at the clock, "I suppose I'm too late."

"You must stay and dine with me—do!"

She pleaded like a child. "Geoffrey has gone to a bachelor party and I was feeling most awfully lonely. There's a hateful animal in the Zoo"—she could afford now to laugh, strengthened by his presence, and her face shone with amusement as she stepped out on to the balcony—"come and

isten—it's been making my blood creep!"

He followed her obediently. It all seemed so natural, her quaint disconnected speech and well-remembered simplicity of manner.

Well-born and conscious of the fact she had no use for mannerisms.

Again the cry came faintly over the trees. Newcomen's eyes twinkled.

"It's a dog," he suggested out of sheer mischief, "tied up in some back garden."

She turned upon him indignantly.

"Nonsense, it's wolves!—listen again."

"I give in," he said, "I'll call it elephants if you like. I'm so anxious to hear all your news. First of all, how are you?"

He gave her a keen anxious glance but the excitement of his unexpected arrival had flushed her cheeks and her face bore no resemblance to the wan, tear-stained one he had last seen in the vine-wreathed pergola at Castellamare.

Conscious of his scrutiny she moved across the room ostensibly to ring the bell and over her shoulder she answered,

"I'm alright—and you? I want to know where you have sprung from in this fashion?"

"I only arrived at Portsmouth yesterday."

The door opened and Susan appeared.

"Tell Dale to lay for two," said Candida. "Captain Newcomen is staying for dinner."

The old woman's face lit up at the words and she stole a sidelong glance at the visitor.

But Newcomen strode forward, eyes alight with memory.

"Well, Susan, and how are you? No more broken legs, I hope?"

She dropped him a country curtsy.

"Nicely, thankye, sir—glad to see you, sir," and departed, wreathed in smiles.

Candida lifted a warning finger, her pretty face dimpling.

"Now—I won't have it! Poor old Susan. I'll tell her you've got a lass in every port! D'you know"—she leaned forward towards him, her fingers clasped loosely together in the old familiar attitude he loved—"you're the one bright spot in all her travels. What with the eruption and 'furrin ways' and what she calls 'nasty heathenish food' the old lady was nearly crazy when she joined me at Amalfi and now when she talks of it she always quotes you as being the only 'prapper man' she met in Italy!"

"That's because I'm a 'man of Devon'—she's a lady of strong common sense."

Their laughs rang out together—the health-giving, pure laugh of sheer mirth and sympathy.

"Aren't they funny, these old country people? She told me the other day that she'd never understood what 'repentance in dust and ashes' meant until that visit to Naples! Fancy that striking her. She loves the Bible, bye the bye, almost as much as you do."

Newcomen pretended to frown.

"If you're going to be ribald——"

But she broke in,

"You can't go now or I shall think you're afraid of a bad dinner. I told you it would be 'pot-luck.'"

"I certainly shan't, but I warn you, I've got a huge appetite."

His eyes wandered towards the Park where the sun was setting in a crimson glow over the distant trees and the greenness of England struck him afresh.

"By Jove, it's nice to be home again!—unexpectedly too."

The maid announced dinner.

"I'll tell you all about it downstairs, if I may."

She turned to the glass smoothing back a wayward curl that fell over her flushed cheek.

"I'm awfully untidy, but then I don't generally expect callers at this time of day!"

"Nasty knock," said Newcomen, as he looked past her into the mirror and their eyes met. "And now I think of it I always seem to be turning up at the dinner-hour!"

She was so filled with the old reckless love of mischief that she retorted over her shoulder as she led the way downstairs—"The first time we met you were shaving, I think."

She could not see the cloud that fell across his face as the scene flashed up in his mind and he pictured her white and speechless in the arms of the young Irishman.

Derrick Kilmarny. He began to hate the name, associating it with the scarcely-defined fear that he drove so loyally from his heart.

"I see your friend is standing for Parliament."

"Yes," said Candida and turned the subject promptly as they entered the dreary-looking dining-room together.

She shrank from discussing her lover with the man before her, conscious of his firmer morality, his sterner code of honour.

"Will you say grace? Or d'you like your soup hot?" she settled herself in Clifton's chair facing her guest.

Conscious of the servant's attention, he evaded the point.

"What a nice view you've got!"

Candida's laugh rang out through the room.

"How subtle! Do you mean yourself, or Frith's railway station over the sideboard? because personally, it always gives me indigestion. Such a horrid unnecessary scuttle to dwell on at meals."

"You're taking unfair advantage of a hungry man! I was looking past you out of the window."

Candida clapped her hands, tears of mirth in her eyes.

"Bravo, bravissimo! the 'past me' is such a delicate compliment."

She checked herself as the servant re-entered the room.

"Now—will you tell me how it is you're home?"

Meanwhile a very different scene was being enacted at the Ritz.

Complicated by the Professor's utter ignorance of English the conversation persistently hung fire.

By the fourth course, however, the guests, warmed by the good cheer, had settled down into friendly pairs.

To Lord Shotover fell the task of entertaining Signor Manteucchi; two of the other men had realised a common interest in golf and Clifton, bored, and sorely tempted to return to his wife, found himself the necessary complement to the little dark-eyed Doctor.

To add to his annoyance his new friend insisted—as foreigners are apt to do—in airing his almost incomprehensible smattering of English, albeit the other had proved himself an efficient linguist—one of the reasons that Shotover had chosen him for the party.

It meant unceasing attention and a fair amount of guess-work to unravel Dr. Gabboni's confused

utterances and the fact that his long and arduous work on Spain had weakened Clifton mentally and physically added to the strain of the moment.

Always an abstemious man, he would go for days together without a glass of wine but to-night he felt the urgent need of stimulant and he drank down his champagne feverishly—to be promptly replaced by the attentive waiter.

The delicately served quails attracted the Italian's attention and he launched forth into a confused description of the arrival of these birds on the Sorrento coast; how the inhabitants would rear high masts on the cliffs above the sea and strain across them the nets against which the birds, arriving in massed flocks from their long journey across the water, would beat themselves ineffectually, and worn out by their prolonged flight fall in heaps to the ground at the mercy of their enemies.

He took a bone up in his fingers and picked it appreciatively whilst he proceeded to extol the judicious admixture of grapes in the dish.

"A complimento, one would say, to the South."

Manfully he sipped his dry champagne, preferring the sweet wine of his country but bowing appreciatively over his glass as he caught his host's eye.

Then back to his weary neighbour.

"All is—buonissimo in England—for it is notta of my visits ze first;" he nodded with a sense of experience, his liquid vowels and accentuated "r's" more pronounced than ever.

"I am to London before, that is tr-r-rue! but it is more so beautiful in ze summer zan as I did by stupidity, in ze winter."

Clifton tried nervously to explain that the season

was really over and the place practically deserted but Dr. Gabboni had too many travelling American friends of the kind who arrive in August bargain-hunting, to accept the fact.

"Above all, ze Engleesh Signora—com' è bellissima! so fair-r-r, an' tall, an' 'er skin, one says ze young almond, when 'e flower in—primavera—all rosa, is it not? But see you now!"

He turned his dark excitable face in the direction of the door where a couple of newcomers stood surveying the room awaiting their chance of a table.

The man was a little Jew, pallid and fat, breathing an air of opulence and possession but the lady by his side was of the very type the Doctor admired, a tall and fair Englishwoman, beautifully dressed, with a complicated arrangement of coiled golden hair.

Not in her first youth, she was nevertheless well-preserved and carried herself confidently, fully aware of the attention she excited.

"What you calla ze 'treat,' is she not?"

He was delighted with his word of slang, totally unconscious of the weary disgust of Clifton, whose claim in literature was that of the Purist.

The couple passed them slowly, raked by the keen black eyes and Gabboni gave a little shrug of disappointment.

"Ze 'air, it is not—'ow you call it?—tr-r-rue!"

Like a drum his "r's" rolled forth under the influence of the wine.

"She is—up-made too in ze face—is it so not?" for his merciless eyes had detected the rouge.

"You're drinking nothing, Clifton."

Lord Shotover's voice came across the round table and he turned to the waiter to fill up, not for the

first time, his friend's empty glass.

"That was Tertzheim with Lady Sophie Colne—did you see them? I met Rupert yesterday—they're off to Scotland shortly. Tertzheim's taken a moor—wears a kilt I believe." His face broadened into a smile as he turned to glance at the *Pêches Melba* that the waiter offered for his approval and gave the order for some special brandy.

So he lost the play of expression on Clifton's countenance as the little Doctor broke in excitedly.

"Cleef-ton! zat is your name?—what a strangeness!" as the other nodded assent.

"And I—who was in thoughts of a Meesis Cleef-ton—at ze moment!—per'aps a relative—who knows?"

And without waiting for the other's response he proceeded volubly.

"She is of a beauty—fair-r-r—with 'air all golda, not blonde—you are with me?—but golda as a twenty-lire piece—all leetle rings—an' ze eyes blue," he threw out his hands admiringly, "blue as our own skies!—I see 'er now," a tenderness crept over the wrinkled Southern face, "as I see 'er ze first day—ill at Sorrento—'er white face on ze bed, an' 'er golda 'air all around—poverina!" He gave a deep sigh of appreciation and picking up a large spoonful of the ice,

"You are relative, per'aps?" he suggested.

But the thoughts were racing through Clifton's brain. It was Candida—of that he was certain—the likeness together with the name admitted of no hesitation. And Sorrento?

Into his jealous heart the thought darted; here was the missing link in the story of her travels, the interim in old Susan's faithful service, the mysterious illness itself.

Instantly he took his resolve but before he voiced his denial he drained his glass that the waiter had again refilled to the brim.

"It's a common name in England—Clifton—I do not think—I recognise—the lady you describe."

The Doctor's face fell.

"It gives me sorrow. I would greatly like news of 'er—so preety and young—and the 'usband so devotissimo!"

"The husband?" The words broke from Clifton's dry lips but Gabboni deep, literally, in his Pêches Melba noticed nothing.

"Si, si—a real 'istory of love." He picked up a lingering dab of ice that decorated his pleated shirt front and in sentimental tones continued,

"'E nurse 'er night an' day—'e take no sleep—a str-r-r-ong man an' a beautiful—'e an' I between us, by the mercy of 'Eaven, we pull 'er into life."

The room raced round Geoffrey and the smooth voice rung faintly in his ears.

"We of the South, we know love when we meet it. I tell you, sir, it was an—adorrr-ation."

He coughed and spit into his handkerchief.

With a great effort Clifton mastered himself, his hands clenched, his heels pressed hard into the floor.

A wild desire for still more damning proofs spurred the unfortunate man onward.

"And afterwards, when she was well?" His voice was jerky with emotion.

"They go on to Amalfi—to join 'er maid, I understand'; she was in Naples, an' ze line destroyed."

Started on a new train of thought Gabboni swallowed his liqueur and proceeded volubly, "Zat makes me to remember—I must tell you of ze eruption."

He launched into strenuous description but Geoffrey heeded him not.

As in a dream at length he heard Shotover's voice.

"We'll have our coffee outside—there's no need to hurry," and still in that strange torpor, rose from table and followed the others into the hall.

Never for a moment did it occur to him to ask for a description of the man.

For before his eyes he saw that lovers' parting in the vineyard at Castellamare and heard old Susan in her garrulous country way extolling the virtues of John Newcomen.

His one desire now was to escape from the Doctor's society—this man who knew too much!—and to be alone with his misery.

The thought of the "Empire" was unspeakable, and drawing his host on one side, he pleaded to a sudden indisposition, which his white face openly confirmed, made hurried adieux and breathed a sigh of heartfelt relief as he found himself in the cool night air without.

CHAPTER XXIII

The summer after its brilliant promise had turned in wet and it was at the end of a soaking day that Derrick returned, tired and somewhat depressed from addressing a meeting in the neighbouring town.

For it had not been a success.

Of that he was sure as the dogcart splashed through the muddy roads and turned at length past the grey old lodges into the drive.

To begin with the hall had been badly filled, doubtless due to the weather, but dispiriting to the speaker, and for once his facile delivery had forsaken him.

He felt the lack of conviction in his words, and spurring himself into further effort, he had only succeeded in talking above the heads of his audience, a condition peculiarly exasperating to country minds.

The election was dangerously near and, despite all his efforts, the result still hung in the balance.

His opponent, the nephew of the late member, had gained a firm hold on the hearts of the town. He was one of themselves, the son of a local brewer, whereas Derrick belonged to that vague eminence referred to as "the County." The cart drew up before the door and throwing off his wet coat in the hall, he walked into the library to find his grandfather warming his back before a roaring fire.

"By Jove—that's a happy thought!" he moved towards the cheering blaze; "what beastly weather it is!"

"The seasons were made for man and not man for the seasons!" The Baronet gave his grandson a shrewd glance and forebore to ask his news. "I'd have a fire all the year round if I wanted it."

Derrick threw himself down into a chair with a yawn of content, stretching his arms up over his head.

"Ough! I'm tired—I made a hash of things to-day."

"I haven't." The old man chuckled triumphantly and Derrick looked up with a smile.

"Well?"

"I drove over to see Glazebrook." He paused and threw another log on to the blaze.

Glazebrook was a large farmer on the edge of the two adjoining estates, tenant to both Sir George and Julian Dirke, but his sympathies were with the Johnstone-Biggs.

Father of five married sons, whom he still ruled with patriarchal severity, the old man was a strong influence in the neighbourhood and to secure his allegiance would mean a noteworthy increase in votes.

"Well?" Derrick's voice was impatient.

"We talked—talked hard—ostensibly about that right-of-way—but after a bit we got round to the election. There's been an ancient story raked up from somewhere about the local schoolmistress. Some calf-love, probably, of Johnstone-Biggs junior in Eton jackets. But Glazebrook's a strict puritan—and then—there's that right-of-way matter. He's worried in conscience and pocket too—a formidable combination. I tried hard to persuade him you had

a higher code of morals,"—he chuckled softly—"may God forgive me!"

Derrick laughed with a rising note of excitement.

"Quite right—so I have just now! Well?"

"Then I stayed on to lunch."

"Good for you!" said his grandson. "What did they give you?"

"Oh, a harmless sort of stew and then the old lady produced a special cheese—a sort of ancestral legacy like you get in Norway—phew!" His face was expressive. "Not content with that she offered me some to take home, which of course I accepted. It was put into the back of the phaeton, with all due solemnity," his eyes gleamed under his bushy brows. "'Pon me soul, I don't know whether I drove it home or it drove me!" he concluded.

Derrick threw his head back and roared.

The warm fire and cheering news were driving away his gloomy mood.

"One of those cases in which it is more blessed to give than to receive," he suggested.

Sir George nodded.

"Altogether I flattered myself I made an impression—that ancient right-of-way question was a happy thought."

He shivered suddenly and spread his hands out towards the fire.

"We'll have a glass of the old port to-night."

Derrick glanced at him anxiously.

"You've not caught cold, I hope?"

"Just a bit chilly—that's all! I've been in wet clothes all day—it's bad luck this weather coming now."

His voice was careless.

The door opened and the butler appeared, a telegram on a tray.

"This was in the hall, sir," he held it out to Derrick, "I thought, perhaps, sir, you'd overlooked it."

Derrick tore it open lazily,

"Thanks—have you buried that cheese, Trench?"

"Yessir." The old servant never moved a muscle.

"You can get out a bottle of the '7' Port," said Sir George from the depths of his armchair, "and we'll have it in here, with some nuts, after dinner—" he turned to Derrick, "don't you think so, over the fire?" but checked himself as he saw his grandson's face.

"What is it?" he asked.

Derrick passed the telegram across.

"What an infernal nuisance! Here—Trench!" he called the butler back; "I shall want the brougham," he looked at the clock, "in half-an-hour's time."

Sir George bent down to the firelight to read the message.

"Anxious to see you to-night—dinner at eight Dirke."

He gave a grunt of annoyance.

"I wonder what's up? You'll have to go."

A thought entered his head and with—for him—a rare want of caution, he voiced it.

"I suppose it's from Julian?" he suggested.

Derrick stared into the fire.

"Of course." He got up with a sigh.

"Time I dressed—I was looking forward to a quiet evening at home."

"No peace for the wicked," said Sir George grimly and added—following up his train of thought, "Remember me to Lady Mary."

Derrick darted a swift look, doubtful of the old man's meaning. Many a time had he wondered of

late if Sir George had suspected the nature of the tie that had bound him to the Dirkes.

Every now and then he would let fall a pointed word with impassive face and every appearance of innocence; and Derrick would feel that a warning hand had been laid for a moment on his shoulder.

With a sudden wave of affection for this most punctilious of mentors he stooped over his grandfather as he passed.

"I'd give a good deal to stay here with you to-night;" his voice was sincere. "It's only duty that takes me."

A curious feeling of relief stole into the other's heart. He loved this boy beyond all the world—better than he had loved his own son.

But all he said was,

"Get along with you, you young rascal—'tis the old port you're after!"

As the door closed he nodded his grey head thoughtfully. "Bless him!" he said, "I'd like to believe that's true."

The rain lashed against the windows and involuntarily he shivered again.

It was odd to feel so cold in front of that blazing fire.

"I must have got a chill—confound it! I'm not so young as I used to be. The day's worth it, though—I believe we've secured Glazebrook."

When dinner was announced he ate but little. His head ached and a sense of heavy fatigue weighed down his limbs.

But he sat through the courses steadily in the great carved chair and returned with a sigh of relief to the warm library for his cherished port.

Meanwhile, Derrick, after his five mile drive, had arrived at the Dirke's country house, a comfortable

modern building breathing that air of luxury and refinement dear to Lady Mary's heart.

The maid ushered him into the drawing-room where he found his hostess, beautifully dressed in some clinging garment of the palest pink, her dark hair gleaming above her finely-cut face, her eyes, under their heavy lids, aglow with the excitement she suppressed.

"Well Derry," she still held his outstretched hand as the door closed behind the maid.

"I couldn't resist the temptation to see you," she came a step nearer, her cheek faintly tinged with colour—"to have you to myself."

He drew back involuntarily and his face hardened.

"Where's Julian?" he asked.

She gave a nervous laugh, chilled by his manner.

"In London, I believe—he went up by the mid-day train to catch Rupert Colne on his way to Scotland."

"Then *you* sent that wire?"

At the tone of his voice resentment stirred in her breast. Was this the man who had kissed her so tenderly but a short time since, in the chintz-covered boudoir?

"Why not? Surely I have the right——" she broke off and went on smoothly as the door opened and the maid announced dinner.

"He asked me to make you his excuses—to say how sorry he was to miss you."

She moved forward with her almost Eastern grace, the long swaying draperies of her dress rustling over the parquet floor, and he followed, full of a silent and steadily-growing anger, into the delicately lighted dining-room.

"It was so cold to-night, I've had a fire—one can hardly believe it's August."

Instinctively the speech called up a picture of the library at home and the figure of his grandfather—still erect despite his eighty years, warming his wrinkled hands before the blaze.

"It's only duty that takes me."

He heard himself repeating the words!

A sensation of utter nausea at the falseness of the position swept over him, and out of the ashes of his burnt-up passion, the phoenix of hatred rose for the too-fond woman before him.

He swallowed his soup moodily whilst she swept into details of the election; then, conscious of the servants, he took his share in the conversation and anxious to keep at this same safe level, recounted his grandfather's visit to the old farmer.

"Glazebrook? Why, he lives at the end of the lane—that gabled house, with the old Tithes barn, isn't it?—how *very* amusing!"

Lady Mary laughed, relieved by the touch of humour but blinded by her own desperate need of love to the current underlying his calm.

For, clever as she was, she had passed that point in her knowledge of the man before her when she could discern each hidden thought and emotion.

Spurred forward by jealousy and fearing the approach of age, she was staking her all on the evening's adventure; and intuition—priceless inheritance of womanhood—that would have strengthened in daily intimacy with the man she loved was drowned by the pent-up torrent of her feelings on this rare moment of tête-à-tête, from which she hoped so much.

Slowly—at least to the man—the dinner, faultlessly served, with all the added charm of shaded candles and fairy-like flowers, drew to a close; and at last, pushing her chair back from the table, Lady Mary rose to her feet.

"I've ordered coffee in the drawing-room—what liqueur will you have? There's a new one I'm trying—it's Russian—I forget the name. Herapath unearthed it in Moscow—or there's the old brandy."

"I'll stick to the one I know, if I may."

"An excellent maxim." She gave him a subtle smile as they passed out into the hall.

Once in the other room they talked indifferently, waiting for the servant to reappear, but as the latter handed round the cups Derrick made an allusion to his early departure.

"May I order my carriage for ten? I've got some work to prepare to-night when I get back—so I hope you will excuse me."

She raised her eyebrows, as she added the sugar to her coffee, and glanced at the clock.

"Why—it's past nine now!" but as he insisted, hampered by the presence of the maid she conceded the point.

"Mr. Kilmarney's brougham at ten."

It could easily wait, she thought, and a little smile flickered across her face.

The door closed behind the parlourmaid.

"At last!"

He looked up at the whispered exclamation and a sudden fear assailed him.

Man-like, he dreaded a scene, and anxious to quench all emotion at the start he ignored the obvious meaning in her voice and responded,

"I've been longing to smoke—may I light up?—unless this is forbidden land;" then went on quickly, resolute to keep to indifferent topics. "What a pretty room you've made it! I think I like it better than your London one—although that is charming too."

"My boudoir is my pet corner in town."

She walked restlessly across to a table beside him, covered with flowers, under the pretence of arranging a rose that had fallen out of the centre bowl, and picking it up in her slim white fingers she stole a glance at Derrick from under the heavy lids.

"But then," she stooped and smelt the mass of blossom, "it's full of memories," she breathed.

Derrick winced. The rôles were being reversed with a vengeance; and a sudden desire to have done for ever with this toying with words forced him into open revolt.

"'Dead loves and buried memories,'" he quoted the lines with intentional cynicism. "Now we've done with all that, it seems odd to look back, doesn't it, Mary?"

He regretted the brutality of the speech the moment the words had passed his lips, and added weakly, "They were good old days, nevertheless."

She turned with a swift movement, her hands outstretched and instinctively he rose to his feet.

"Have you forgotten, Derry?"

And as she stood there speechless, she swayed a little towards him, her breath quickening, her eyes full of the passion that possessed her.

A sudden memory of Candida—how he had taken her in his arms and kissed the little curls that framed that sweetest face, a memory of her clear blue eyes so full of trust and love, rose up like a phantom and killed the faint lingering attraction of the woman before him.

"Yes," he said unsteadily, "since you *will* have it—it is better to forget."

And for a moment they stood there, breathing deeply, looking in each other's eyes.

She had so little expected the speech, blind in her infatuation and trusting to the influence of the hour,

her own beauty, and all the old attractions of the carefully-prepared tête-à-tête that for a moment the candour of his reply hardly pierced her intelligence.

Then, with a low cry, she turned from him, her face buried in her hands.

"You wished it yourself, Mary," his voice was desperate—"you wrote and told me so."

Then the storm broke. For her anger rose up at the equivocal excuse, and a torrent of recrimination broke from her lips. Her voice, shaken by hysterical sobs, gained strength as she went on, accusing him of faithlessness, of every grade of deception.

It was to this, then, he had led her—to this shameful humiliation, this death-blow to her pride! For this he had tempted her away from her husband's lawful side, broken her code of honour and taught her sin.

This too was his gratitude for her long and faithful devotion—for her open interest in his career, her steady schemes for his advance.

He had used her as a tool to further his political aims, and now that he stood, his feet firm upon the ladder of success, she was to be cast aside like the old rungs below, useless, despised, "dead."

A torrent of tears shook her—she trembled from head to foot.

"Oh, Derry, Derry, you've broken my heart!" And as he stood there, helpless, furious with her and himself, vainly trying to calm her by vague words of denial that only added fuel to the flame, she turned upon him with her last weapon, the name of "Candida."

She flung it in his face, charging him with a new liaison, tarring the woman with the same ignoble brush of contempt.

Still, with a mighty effort, he kept a rein on his

tongue, vaguely foreseeing the consequences her evil knowledge might bring upon them both.

Only when, half-mad with hysteria, the mocking words broke forth,

"Candida . . . Candida! the *purity* of the name is misleading!" something seemed to snap in his brain and beside himself with anger he caught her by the arm, forcing her to be still.

"You are not fit to breathe it . . ." his words cut like a knife.

She gave one glance into his set face and cowered before him, reading all the ruin of her hopes.

Suddenly conscious of the hardness of his grip, his hand dropped to his side, and without another word or glance he turned on his heel and strode from the room.

As she heard the front door close she slipped down on to her knees, too weak to stand, and burying her face on the sofa before her, gave way unrestrainedly to her tears.

The minutes ticked on slowly and at last the clock on the mantelpiece struck ten.

Almost immediately she caught the noise of the brougham wheels fading away down the drive.

Her grief had spent itself and rising to her feet she unlatched the French window that opened on to the lawn, with an instinctive longing for air.

The rain had passed, leaving a starry sky, and drawing her skirts around her she stepped down into the cool darkness of the garden.

Somewhere, far away, through the silence of the country-side, a bell fell on her ear, with a low flat note, tolling.

For a moment she wondered at it; then remembered.

It was the custom of the old farmer, that Glaze-

brook they had discussed, to hold prayers at ten; and the bell was to remind those of his house who were detained beyond the farm or wandered for their pleasure these warm summer nights.

Nine in winter, ten in summer, the rule was inviolable.

At the thought a memory of Derrick's conversation flashed into her mind and Sir George's diplomatic advances.

She remembered dully how much hung on the farmer's allegiance and her own experience in the busy political house had taught her the value of each individual vote.

She pressed her hands to her throbbing head and a sudden desire for revenge sprang into birth.

He had ruined her life—she would ruin his career!

All the pent-up bitterness of the blow swept over her and there and then she dedicated herself to the crushing of his pride.

He had cast her aside, spurning her offer of help, openly flouting her for her rival's sake. He should see whose power was mightiest—hers or that "gold-haired doll's!"

"Candida!"—she smiled grimly at the hated name, realising that her lover had given her the key to his own undoing.

Slowly she formed her plans.

There was an immediate point of attack close to her very door—the well-known puritanic severity of Glazebrook.

Once convinced of Derrick's modern views, his smiling contempt of orthodox morality, no power on earth would induce the old farmer to elect such a representative.

Moreover his influence in the neighbourhood

would sway the easily-led crowd of villagers he so largely employed.

To spread a definite scandal was to lay the laurels at the feet of Johnstone-Biggs, blotting out that half-forgotten flirtation of youthful days with the somewhat mature school-teacher.

As she passed back into the house and closed the windows behind her she remembered that Glaze-rook would be calling early next morning to discuss a question of repairs.

She had seen the letter lying on her husband's desk.

In his absence she would receive the old farmer herself and further flatter his vanity by consulting him on some small point of agricultural interest.

It would be strange if the conversation did not turn to current topics, notably on the decadence of the age as compared to those bygone days that the old man would fondly revert to.

Times were not as they were!—the usual argument of the older generation.

And for once she would take her stand on the footing of middle-age and meet him hal'-way in his doleful predilections for the future.

Past-mistress in the art of innuendo she would drop a word here, a scornful gesture there, hint at this, smile softly at that and leave poison subtly instilled to work in the Nonconformist mind.

Nothing definite should be stated; but the mere fact of doubt in that house that Kilmarney had publicly proclaimed as sheltering his most powerful allies and the knowledge of his intimacy with the Dirkes—that intimacy of years' standing which should leave them the best judges of his private life, could not fail to have a certain effect.

All should be done under the cloak of friend-

liness, Lady Mary would even make excuses for the natural exuberance of youth—for the fascination of his manner and the easy-going temperament of his race that made him so obvious a prey to a designing woman.

"Candida!" Again she whispered the name—and as, at the vision it called up, she looked in the mirror before her and met her own dark glance, with a strange perversion of gratitude, she thanked high Heaven for the cleverness with which it had pleased a far-seeing Providence to endow her!

CHAPTER XXIV

When Geoffrey Clifton left the Ritz behind him, refusing the porter's suggestion of a cab, he turned up Bond Street, quiet and deserted at that hour of night, feeling the imperative need of solitude to face the blow that had fallen upon him.

With the slow anger of his kind, with every step he took, his animosity against the woman he had married increased.

No deception could have been more profound. He had believed her so pure and inaccessible, this maiden-wife of his, that the mere thought of tarnishing her child-like innocence had served as a sure barrier between him and his desires.

And the man had indeed suffered, physically and mentally, from this late passion of middle-age.

He drove his heel into the pavement as the thought went home that all the while the woman, who by every look and gesture had forbidden him his legal rights, was already the mistress of another.

The dormant instinct of evil, that touch of the brute that civilisation can hide but never efface, stirred in him as he realised his power.

For the barrier was down for ever; his chivalry misplaced.

As he passed up Brook Street into Hanover Square, one of those sad stains that lie across the

avowedly most respectable capital of Europe—a woman of the streets—accosted him boldly.

He silenced her with such a glance that she shrank back with a gesture of fear, and turning swiftly, moved away as she heard the laugh that followed, with its almost insane note of bitterness.

For Clifton was comparing her to his wife!

On and on like a man in a dream, the evil project slowly determining itself, up Regent Street with its fitting shadows of shame, into the broad silence of Portland Place to where the trees were outlined against the starry sky.

"John Newcomen's mistress"—he whipped himself with the words and the thought of that flower-like face, those blue eyes shining, the memory of that small red mouth, lips parted in dimpling laughter, stilled by the kisses of another.

He choked with impotent rage.

He was like a man possessed. For beyond the fury of his resentment, he had drunk heavily that night and the cool air without only accentuated the effects of his unwonted dissipation.

As he neared the terrace in which they lived he saw the light shine forth from the drawing-room windows.

She had lied again!—was still up and about—that headache another subterfuge to rid herself of his hated presence.

Or perhaps she feared. . . .

He turned the key in the door and entered the hall. There on the narrow table lay a man's hat and stick.

And into his brain there swept the damning conviction that the rival he hated was there, in the lighted drawing-room now, with her and alone.

As he crept noiselessly up the stairs, a laugh

floated down, the clear rippling note he knew so well and with it another, a deeper one, that added the last spur to his fury.

It was at him they were laughing, the trusting husband they thought so far away!

All the blood surged up into his head, with a sound of rushing water, as he reached the landing and threw the door wide open.

Within, bending over a photograph, side by side sat Candida and John Newcomen, whom she had declared but yesterday far away at sea!

At the sudden noise they started, seeing the wild apparition in evening dress, speechless with fury, his eyes blazing in his contorted face.

For a second, silence prevailed, the heavy pregnant silence charged with coming disaster.

Then, as Newcomen rose to his feet, realising the presence of his host, Clifton found his voice and all the pent-up passion burst forth.

"Caught!" he shouted, "caught, by God!"

CHAPTER XXV

The scene that followed, as Newcomen afterwards reviewed it, seemed like some strange mad dream.

For to him alone the motive was incomprehensible. The very suddenness of the attack paralysed his faculties, but at Candida's shrill cry of fear he pulled himself together and checked the remonstrance that rose to his lips; then as Geoffrey turned on her, pouring forth a flood of vituperation, the word "Sorrento" repeated again and again opened up a channel of intelligence, and out of the recesses of his heart, Newcomen saw his secret terror—that fear he had so loyally stifled—creep forth from its hiding-place.

For under the whip of her husband's merciless tongue Candida cowered, wordless; finding no refutation of his calumnies, no honest frenzy of indignation.

Only when he coupled her name with that of the astonished man before him did she venture an agonised protest.

"No, no," she wailed, "it is all a hideous mistake," and buried her face in her hands.

For with Derrick's name on her lips there rose the memory of his parting words.

"There must be no hint of scandal—no shadow

of a doubt." And she saw the road cut off from under her feet.

Her brain, stunned by the violence of her husband's wrath, clung feebly to the one idea and when he turned on Newcomen, charging him with his presence at Sorrento, quoting the Doctor as witness, daring him to deny the same, she cast such a look of agonised protest at the indignant face of the sailor that, divining painfully her wishes, he strangled the denial that rose to his lips.

For Derrick he had no thought. His one desire was to shield the woman before him, and since he could not fully understand, all his long life of discipline urged him to a blind obedience.

His stubborn silence seemed to add the last touch to Clifton's temporary aberration and so fierce was his attitude towards the sternly composed figure before him, that with a cry, Candida threw herself between the two.

Instinctively Newcomen put out his arm to shield her, and at the sight, the final thread of reason snapped in Clifton's brain.

With a strangled note of fury he caught his wife by the shoulders, and swung her from him with such violence that she fell, her arms outstretched, her head against the high brass fender.

"You damned cur!" The words broke from Newcomen and the next moment he was kneeling beside the woman, tenderly raising her head.

Across the whiteness of her face a thin stream of blood began to creep, where the sharp corner had cut the skin, but her eyes were closed, her body limp and inert.

Suddenly sobered by the sight Clifton staggered backwards and collapsed on to a chair, and as the sailor, forgetful of all save the value of the life be-

fore him, turned with a curt word of command, "Ring that bell—can't you?"—he began to laugh, with the same hysterical note that had frightened the woman in the square.

Realising his uselessness, Newcomen laid his burden gently down and went to the bell himself and there appeared the startled face of old Susan in the doorway, hands uplifted at the sight.

"Eh, my lamb, my bonnie lamb!" She ran forward to her mistress' side, turning an indignant face as she passed the huddled figure, from which laugh after laugh helplessly escaped.

Together, she and Newcomen lifted Candida on to the sofa, and despatched a frightened housemaid in all haste for the nearest medical man.

Leaving her in Susan's care, with a last glance at Clifton, now worn-out and harmless, he went downstairs into the hall to meet the doctor with an anxiety he could barely disguise.

After what seemed hours of waiting he at last appeared—an elderly man with a shrewd kindly face and Newcomen explained briefly.

Mrs. Clifton had had an accident, falling against the fender, and her husband, alarmed at the same, had utterly collapsed.

The tale was bald and the eyes of the two men met, and recognising honest purpose, warmed to each other.

Between them they carried Candida up to bed.

One glance at Clifton was enough for the medical man and he despatched the housemaid with a quickly written prescription.

"A sleeping draught," he nodded to the sailor—"the other's the real patient."

"I'll wait for the verdict below," and Newcomen went downstairs into the dreary dining-room where

but a few hours since her laughing face had smiled at him across the table.

How long ago it seemed!

He sat down and gave himself up to a strenuous endeavour to piece together the scattered fragments of Clifton's speech.

Obviously that unconventional interlude at Sorrento had reached his ears—the illness of Candida and open devotion of Derrick Kilmarny.

But why in the name of Heaven had Geoffrey taken him for the man?

There was Susan, of course, with her talkative ways. But Dr. Gabboni—for Clifton had mentioned the name—he should know better. Anyhow the matter, as concerning himself, could be easily righted.

But this would not end the affair.

With all his honest heart he pitied Candida and tried to thrust away all thought of blame, all baser suspicion.

Searching for a foothold for his loyalty one reiterated phrase of Clifton's struck him with renewed force.

For the latter, stripped of all decency by his passion, had openly taunted the shrinking woman with being a mistress when she was not in reality a "wife!"

And a strange feeling of exultation swept over the man at the thought that she had never yet belonged to "that despicable little worm."

Moreover if this were true she would be still more unlikely to fall a victim to the brilliant young Irishman.

But what was to come of it all?

For himself he feared nothing. But, for her, the future was black indeed

It seemed quite impossible to prove her innocence; and in any case she must not go on living by this irresponsible creature's side.

Would he try to divorce her?

He sat up suddenly at the thought as he realised that Clifton's present delusion pointed to him as co-respondent in the case. Then he laughed aloud. It was too absurd to dwell upon. He—John Newcomen, with his straight old-fashioned views, his steady beliefs, his sober disciplined life!

He had only to prove his recall to his ship—the orders that had carried him far from the scene for the Royal visit to Sicily.

But this must end in implicating another—the man who deserved it certainly, but offering no loophole for Candida's escape.

In vain he sought for excuse—reasonable excuse that a husband would accept.

What folly it had been!—what a playing with fire!

Bitterly he blamed Derrick Kilmary, the man of the world, who had taken advantage of a girl's ignorance and love of romance. It would have been so easy to send for a nurse—for a woman to stand for propriety between the pair.

He had himself suggested it, only to be met by the Irishman's denunciation of those "sad Sisters of the Church—with their solemn tread and funereal garments!"

He was even blaming himself for his want of insistence when he heard the doctor's step upon the stairs.

"Well," he sprang to his feet, "how is she?"

The other reserved his opinion, accepting mechanically the chair that Newcomen drew forward.

"If I may have some ink I should like to write a

prescription—my pen's run dry; or perhaps"—he glanced at the clock—"I will call at the chemist's myself."

He caught Newcomen's anxious eye.

"She's still unconscious. The forehead?—oh, that is nothing—a mere scratch—I have made a full examination and can find no apparent injury; it is the shock I fear. I should like to know," he paused for a moment and blinked through his glasses, "exactly how the accident occurred."

"Mr. Clifton startled his wife," the sailor was choosing his words carefully, uncertain what Candida might wish to conceal, "she stepped back, frightened, caught her foot, I suppose, and fell against the fender."

"Hm—" the other pondered; then the keen eyes searched John Newcomen's face.

"You are—perhaps—a relation of hers?"

"No—only a friend—nothing more."

Some instinctive knowledge of the man before him prompted the blunt reply and the doctor smiled suddenly, attracted by the serious face.

"I see. But perhaps you can tell me if she has a mother living—or even a sister who could be sent for?—I shall find her a nurse at once but she would be better with someone of her own flesh and blood just now; and—forgive my speaking plainly—Mr. Clifton is the last person she should see. The man is suffering from nervous collapse and is hardly responsible, I should say—certainly not fit to enter a sick room."

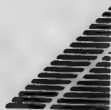
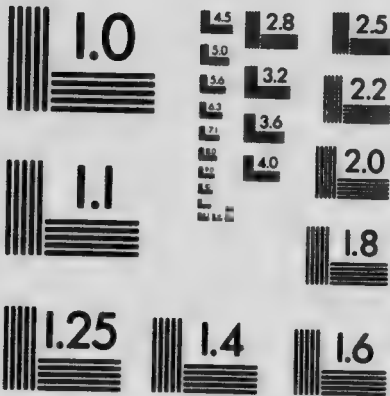
The mere thought of it drove all scruples from Newcomen's mind.

"I'd better tell you the truth," he said, "he mustn't go near her—he's got some mad idea of jealousy. The er—accident was entirely due to him."



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"Hm—" the doctor nodded his grey head, "I guessed as much from something he said. The nurse will have strict orders—but her mother——"

"She died at her birth," Newcomen broke in, "and there's no sister; she's quite alone in the world—poor little woman."

His voice shewed the sincerity of his friendship and the doctor made up his mind.

He got up from the chair, one eye on the clock. "In that case the nurse is the only thing—luckily, I know of the very woman and believe she is free. Of course the shock is the danger-point. It is the very worst thing that could have happened to Mrs. Clifton—in her condition."

Something seemed to stop in Newcomen's heart and he bent forward, clutching the back of the chair.

"In her condition?" His voice was low. The doctor nodded his head.

"Luckily she consulted me nearly two months ago—so I know what to expect. I see no harm in telling you—she is going to have a child."

Then, at last, John Newcomen understood.

CHAPTER XXVI

"Who knows

The furthest limit of the circle cast
By one small pebble in the Sea of Life?
Thy love and mine—unhallowed though it be—
Save by the Goddess, Nature, whom we serve—
May yet move mountains. Nation may war on nation
And that deep-thinking realm where science sways
Be shaken to the depths of its philosophy!

"Think you the mother of Napoleon,
Kneeling before the priest breathing her vows
In that far island bound by seas so blue,
Saw through the filmy fold of marriage veil
Vision of laurels round an infant's brow?
Heard the fierce note of battle, trumpet's blast
That later swept to war the fair green land
Stirring armed Europe 'gainst the Corsican

"Nay—lay thy head upon my shoulder here,
Those curls of gold that are my fondest wealth
And let me read the thought in thy dear eyes—
(Blue eyes that meet my glance so trustfully
That from a love so perfect—yet so mad!—
As links thy clever woman soul to mine
In these the last days of a weary world
May rise a man to whom all History kneels "

Thus, Derrick Kilmarney, seated on a sunny log,
expressed himself with all due eloquence, quite
reconciled, under his new scheme, to the advent of
A SON.

That it might be a daughter?—he waved the idea
aside; for all poetic purposes a son was better.

He had risen unusually early and indeed the day warranted it, with its clear sky, and sparkling grass, where the dew still lingered in the hollow of the Park; and a sudden memory of Candida—that little sun-worshipper—had blotted out the heavy work before him, in this brief spell that he had stolen from his hours of sleep.

Now as he sat there, the verses he dared not send by post outspread upon his knees, drinking in the full glory of the morning, he ran over again in detail the second course of action he found so altogether preferable to his original scheme.

He was part-owner of a yacht—a small but seaworthy affair—and his friend under whose name it was registered was taking it down to Cowes.

Once the gay week over it would lie idle awaiting Kilmarney's orders. What more simple than to send it to Dartmouth harbour? For, in a few days now, Candida would be going down to her old Devonshire home. By the time the election was over and all the consequent fuss, Parliament would have broken up for the long summer recess.

How easy it would be for Candida to find an excuse for a night or two in town—her dentist or dressmaker would suffice—be seen off by Susan in the London train, but alighting at Exeter change her course for the harbour where her lover would meet her.

Then away to some hiding-place. He knew of the very spot—a little Belgian fishing village where Candida would be safe; whilst he, for prudence sake, would proceed to gay Ostend and keep "en evidence" until all chance of suspicion were past.

For he dreaded the acumen of Lady Mary Dirke.

After all, people constantly disappeared; you had only to pick up a newspaper to read of a vanishing

lady and the utter perplexity of the police!

Once the nine days wonder had evaporated he could return to his lady's side and plan their next move with all necessary caution. It would be like a game of play and he smiled as he pictured Candida in her rôle of runaway.

There need be no scandal, no open defiance of Mrs. Grundy.

They ran a certain risk, to be sure, but this was decidedly better than meeting trouble halfway.

It might go on for years—you never could tell!

He thought of little Mrs. Max Truman and smiled.

There came the soft thud of hoofs in the meadow behind and then a pleasant voice.

"Good-morning, Mr. Kilmarney," and turning, he saw the neat figure of Dora Chesney over the hedge, mounted on Fiammetta, Lady Mary's favourite hack.

She looked down at him laughingly.

"Composing speeches so early! Why, I thought, like the very best sermons, they were all extempore."

To her amusement he folded the paper and slipped it inside his pocket.

"I don't mind telling you," he answered gaily, "it's a love-letter."

"Oh—then I mustn't disturb you;" she made a mischievous movement of her whip which Fiammetta resented.

"Being an authority yourself in these matters now," laughed Derrick. "How's Mr. Erroll?"

Dora coloured.

"Oh—languishing in Cheshire—but he's coming down for the week-end if Mary's well enough. She's been awfully seedy you know, with a bad cold—she wired for me two days ago and now I'm sick-nurse. She seems thoroughly run down."

Derrick avoided her straight glance.

"Too much season, I expect," and went on quickly; "are you aware you're trespassing?" But his voice was not severe.

"I didn't expect other early worms to be out so I took the short cut across the Park—besides, it's an old permission from the *real* owner." She tossed her head saucily. "How's Sir George?"

A cloud came across the young man's face.

"He's not a bit well. He got wet through the other day and the result's a nasty chill. But he *won't* see a doctor and he won't stay in bed."

Dora smiled. "Just like him! Shall I come and give him a piece of my mind?"

For she was a favourite with the old man, who liked her bright outspoken ways and compared her favourably with her more brilliant cousin.

"I hope he'll be well enough to witness your triumph."

"More likely Johnstone-Biggs'—it will be a near thing, you know."

His voice went suddenly grave.

The girl nodded sympathetically. "Oh, you'll win right enough—cheer up!"

The chestnut mare fidgeted away from the hedge.

"I must be going—I shall be late for my patient's breakfast. Oh, bye the bye, you know the Cliftons, don't you?—she's been awfully ill too—poor little woman!"

Occupied with the fretting animal she did not see the other's face or notice the little pause that followed her words.

"I'm sorry to hear it," he said at last, "do you know what's the matter?"

But Fiammetta was past cajoling and the girl's answer floated over the hedge in little jerks.

"She's had an accident—a fall—I don't really understand the nurse's letter—anyhow she's in bed—I was going up for the day—but she's put me off—I *must* go—good-bye!"

And with a snort and a plunge the pair were gone.

Derrick turned back towards the house, a prey to sudden anxiety.

"An accident!" The phrase haunted him unpleasantly, with the secret knowledge of how much the words might mean.

He reached the terrace, his thoughts far away, full of apprehension—foreseeing endless complications.

He hoped to Heaven she was all right!

As he passed the low French windows he glanced mechanically into the dining-room.

Sir George was there, punctual as ever, but as the young man paused on the step he saw the erect figure shaken by a sudden paroxysm of coughing.

More trouble! He shrugged his shoulders with a sense of irritation, overcome with growing responsibilities. He *must* call in a doctor. There should be no more evasion of such a simple duty. On his way to the committee-room this morning he would stop at Hailes' house and ask him to drop in to lunch with Sir George, as if by accident.

He swung into the room, a fine picture of youth and vigour.

"Good-morning, sir; how are you to-day?"

"I'm all right," said his grandfather testily. "You'll be late if you don't hurry. The coffee's cold as it is."

Infected by the other's mood, he helped himself silently to breakfast, and frowned at the pile of letters before his plate.

Then, moved by a secret thought, turned them over with a touch of anxiety, and his heart gave a throb of relief as he saw one in Candida's big handwriting.

He pushed the heap aside, conscious of Sir George's presence—conscious too of the look of ill-health about him.

"I caught a fair trespasser this morning. She had the audacity to send you her love"

The tired face lighted up with an effort.

"Who was it?"

"Miss Dora Chesney, very fresh and smiling, exercising Fiammetta across the home meadow. When I taxed her with it she refused to apologise—just said with a laugh she was 'taking the short cut'."

"And welcome she is to it." Sir George spoke heartily. "I like that girl, there's something wholesome about her."

"A delicate compliment!" Derrick laughed.

"A sound one," said his grandfather. He pushed his untouched plate away from him with a movement of disgust.

"Can't eat—sticking in the house like this—it would do me a power of good to have a gallop myself."

He walked to the open window and looked out into the sunshine.

Derrick got up and helped himself to another slice of ham.

"Not very wise, I should say, with that cough of yours."

He broke open the topmost letter and the frown deepened on his face as he read his friend's news.

Glazebrook had been heard protesting unswerving allegiance to his rival!

cast aside for the immediate redress of such cruel miscarriage of justice.

The scrunch of wheels on the gravel stirred him from his absorption.

What could he do? He was to address a meeting that day at three, another in the evening at eight. Every minute of his time was engaged. Friday was polling day, and the result would be held over until Saturday.

Sunday was his earliest chance.

Instinctively he tried to minimise Candida's danger—to deceive himself on the urgency of her need.

She had a resource—she was able to write. A good nurse too, so she said, who guarded her door like a dragon, night and day.

So far then, she was safe. The doctor ordered rest. Further shocks were obviously bad for her health.

Mechanically, he gathered his papers together and went out to the cart.

Newcomen? Damn the fellow! He'd blundered in, in his righteous way, and must take the result. People weren't divorced in four days! He could afford to wait. All his old love of procrastination rose up in him, his innate shirking of responsibility, his passion for freedom.

He passed the doctor's door without a thought of Sir George, his anger rising slowly as the first shock of pity subsided.

Women never understood. They lived a narrow life, wrapped up in their own emotions. Public issues were nothing to them compared to the domestic outlook.

He was bound by all laws of honour to see the election through and he could not afford to waste a minute of his time.

After all, Candida had no lawful right upon him ; her very insistence showed a singular want of trust.

On went the specious reasoning, keeping measure with the cob's hoofs.

Surely she could rely on his doing the right thing and leave him to choose the moment.

A knot of boys at the corner of the street raised a feeble cheer as they saw the party colours that fluttered upon the cart.

Derrick sat up straighter and touched the cob with his whip.

Candida was unnerved at present—she exaggerated the trouble. He had heard women in that condition were often unreasonable.

There was no real need for immediate action. He would write a careful letter—tender, but to the point—reminding her of her promise.

And with that, he got out of the cart and once more the busy man of the hour walked forward into his committee-room.

CHAPTER XXVII

The night that followed the doctor's verdict was to John Newcomen the darkest of his life.

Little by little, however, his first feeling of horror and amazement gave way to a deep compassion for the unfortunate woman who had broken those moral laws he so rigidly supported. Perhaps the greater shock, had he realised it, lay in the discovery of his own attitude towards her.

For his eyes were open at last and he could no longer blind himself to the quality of the sentiment she inspired; and the knowledge that he himself, despite his sterner tenets, was as deeply in love with a married woman as Derrick Kilmarny—the man he so bitterly blamed—broadened his outlook on life with a vengeance.

It was the first time that such a temptation had crossed his path and in his natural simplicity he had hitherto believed such a tragedy impossible to a man of his well-governed temperament.

She was the wife of another. That was enough to render her sacrosanct in his sight, but not enough—here came the crushing surprise!—to prevent him from falling in love.

No mere code of honour, no religious principle could blot out the fact that above all other women he loved Clifton's wife, and he felt as though his

whole carefully-built palace of morality were crumbling about his ears.

And in his bitter self-condemnation he found a new-born excuse for the woman he loved.

For if this had happened to him—sober, clear-headed John Newcomen—who could blame the impulsive, warm-hearted girl, smarting under a sense of neglect and loneliness, for losing her heart to the ardent young Irishman?

Every tiny circumstance, the whole bewildering story of romance, tended to her undoing.

"Judge not, that ye may not be judged!"

The solemn words rang in his ears and he forced himself bravely to face the dangers ahead, leaving the verdict of past conduct to a higher tribunal.

But reverence held too large a part in his nature to allow the utter dethronement of his ideal. Never for a second did he drag Candida down to the level of common immorality.

Fighting his way dimly through all his upheaved notions he saw that to her Kilmarny was the *husband*—the man for whom she would sacrifice herself again and again—not the modern lover that "ennui" brings, but the centre round whom her whole life turned—the man she had chosen before all others.

In her illogical young mind Clifford was still the guardian—the legal jailer she was bound to obey and to whom she had never even promised her love.

Inch by inch he was placing her back on that high pedestal from which she had slipped.

She could not be called immoral—he set his jaw doggedly—for never was there a woman less disposed to promiscuity, and her unique lapse from

accepted virtue was the gift of her whole body and soul to the man she loved—the first and the only man—since Clifton was her husband merely in name.

And then the punishment!—the heavy price she paid.

He thought of her tear-stained face in the vineyard at Castellamare; her hopeless acceptance of all that lay before her.

Alone in her misery, she could not turn to her husband; her mother was dead, her lover had failed her.

He remembered the crumpled telegram and her exceeding bitter words.

"It's always the woman who pays—always, always! God—what an unfair world!"

For three deadly months she had borne the whole weight of her secret knowledge, fighting her own ill-health, screening the man she loved.

And now that the crash had come his whole heart went out to the lonely figure and every chivalrous instinct prompted his determination to stand by her to the end.

But had he the right to interfere? What of the other man?

The old stern doctrine that "marriage should atone," he dismissed with a sinking heart. He had no faith in Derrick Kilmarney and the more he pondered upon it the less he felt convinced that divorce in the Irishman's case would lead to matrimony.

His whole conduct in the sailor's eyes was utterly corrupt.

How dared he stand for Parliament, a representative of his country, at such a juncture in his private life?

Either he must leave the woman to her fate or face a public scandal. His present course pointed but too strongly to the former.

What was to come of it all? Who could save Candida, tossed between dishonour and neglect, open scandal or secret misery, the victim of two men each in their way unworthy?

The dawn crept up out of the sky and still he sat in the narrow hotel bedroom, his head sunk upon his hands, his soul tortured by the knowledge of his own impotence.

At last, worn-out, he got into bed, with a final simple prayer to the God he believed in, for guidance.

Then, as he fell asleep, wrapped in the all-pervading idea, his dreams turned to the woman he loved and he saw again the picture that had haunted him over many a mile of sea, the sweet white face amidst the tangle of curls on the pillow and the little hand that hung so limply down with its ominous golden ring.

"Take care of her!" Alas for Candida.

Early next morning found him at the doctor's door, anxious for news.

The parlourmaid, scenting a patient, gave him the busy man's hours—two till four—he would not be in till then.

Disconsolate, Newcomen went away, fearing, for Candida's sake, to approach the house and wandered aimlessly into Regent's Park.

After some skirmishing he could see her windows from between the trees. The blinds were up and his face brightened at the sight—surely it was a good omen.

He sat down on the grass, protecting himself from

view by the broad trunks of a clump of elms and lit his pipe.

The trees made a pleasant shelter from the heat of the day and he lolled out at full length and puffed away contentedly.

Some children approached from a distant sidewalk, three small urchins and a ragged girl in a scarlet petticoat.

Choosing a smooth patch of the worn turf they proceeded to set up stumps and enter into the noble game of cricket.

"Thankyer-sir!"—the ball rolled to Newcomen's feet.

He threw it up, interested despite himself by the serious air of the quartette.

The little girl was allowed to field but evidently enjoyed no prospect of an innings.

Once the ball caught her sharply on the knee which gaped serenely through a torn hole in her stocking.

For a moment her face contracted as she limped forward to return it.

"No blubbing, naw," said the captain with authority; "ef yer cawnt stand a 'it or two yer no good ter us."

Newcomen smiled grimly. She was learning her place in life.

Then he saw a brougham drive up to the Cliftons' door.

He rose to his feet and obeying a sudden impulse threw a copper apiece to the cricketers, not forgetting the lady in the ragged petticoat.

Making his way through the distant opening he strode back down the road to the entrance of the terrace.

As he came up abreast with the knot of trees a

shrill wail of sorrow reached his ears; it was the little girl contributing to party expenses.

For a quarter of an hour he walked up and down, keeping steady watch, and at last the doctor came out and sprang hurriedly into the brougham.

As it turned round into the open road Newcomen stopped the coachman with an imperative gesture.

"Forgive me," he said as the doctor nodded good-humouredly. "I was so anxious—how is Mrs. Clifton?"

"Will you get in?" said the other, throwing the door wide open. "I'm due at a consultation but if you can spare the time we can talk on the way."

Newcomen thankfully accepted the offer.

"Well," said his new friend, as the carriage rolled forward—"she's better—distinctly better. The difficulty now will be to keep her quiet. Despite the nurse's strong objections she managed to write a letter this morning—was so upset, in fact, that to soothe her the nurse consented. Here it is, bye-the-bye—I was properly vexed with both of them! She begged me to post it for her, and promised to be obedient in future." He smiled at the recollection and called through the speaking-tube to his coachman.

"Stop at the first letter-box."

Almost immediately, the carriage drew up on Newcomen's side of the pavement.

"I can reach it from here," he said and the doctor passed him the letter.

There was no need to look at the address—he knew it was to Derrick Kilmarney!

Then forward again, the strong pair of horses covering the ground rapidly.

"And your other patient?"

"He's in a queer state. Honestly, I'm perplexed—this is no mere nervous breakdown. You don't know his family history at all, I suppose?"

"No—I'm afraid I can't help you. I never saw him before the other night."

The doctor looked at the bronzed face curiously, his theory falling to pieces.

A sudden memory rose in Newcomen's mind.

"Yes, by Jove—I did though. He was the fellow at Castellamare!"

He whistled softly to himself as he pieced the scene together.

They had arrived by the same train. So the other must have followed close upon his heels. Surely Clifton had not been there, near the vine-wreathed pergola, a silent witness of Candida's tragic tears and Newcomen's farewell?

Was this the key to the husband's extraordinary mistake?

The doctor's voice roused him from his absorption. "Anyhow he's not fit to go near his wife. She's not out of the wood yet by a long way—she wants infinite care and quiet. Luckily she likes her nurse. That's a great thing."

The carriage drew up before a door in Harley Street and Newcomen, jumping out, thanked the doctor fervently.

"It's awfully good of you to have given me this lift," adding, "Will you see Mrs. Clifton again to-day?"

The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"I shall go round about six; if you happen to be in my direction"—despite himself he smiled—"look in for later news."

"Thanks, I will."

With a grateful glance he wrung the friendly hand.

As he entered the house the doctor looked at his crushed fingers ruefully.

"A good grip," he decided, "but I like the chap. Now, why isn't *he* the husband instead of that neurotic little student?"

Meanwhile the object of his speculations had walked on into Regent Street and down Waterloo Place to his deserted club.

Here kindly Fate provided him with a friend also stranded, for domestic reasons, in this August emptiness and they lunched together happily, each glad to run across a familiar face.

Towards evening his steps turned instinctively to Regent's Park.

The doctor was out, but had left a message.

The patient was not so well—with a rising temperature.

The sailor's heart sank within him, realising the cause, the fever of impatience with which she waited for Derrick Kilmarney's reply.

He slept badly, full of anxiety, and next morning found him betimes at his vigil behind the sheltering elms.

Would Kilmarney arrive? and if so, what would happen? He lost himself in futile conjecture, one eye glued on the Clifton's door.

The doctor arrived and went. Again he intercepted the bulletin.

Mrs. Clifton was quieter this morning—the medicine had agreed with her, soothing her troubled nerves.

Back went Newcomen to his post in Regent's Park.

The tradespeople clattered up and down the area

steps, the postman came and went, with his sharp rat-tat. Once a telegraph boy on a bike pulled up before the house, but changing his intention as he re-read the address delivered the message next door.

The day wore on and the sun broiled down, wrapping the terrace in the heavy silence of noon.

Newcomen shifted his position as the shadows changed. But Derrick Kilmarney failed to arrive.

The children came again and accepting the sailor as a landmark proceeded with their game, taking full advantage of his good-nature with constant "Thankyersir's."

To pass the time he taught the eldest boy a bowling twist he had picked up in a spell at Hong Kong and upset all their ideas of the Rights of Sex by putting in the little girl to bat.

After five careful balls she scored a run and in the midst of hot triumph was "caught out," to Newcomen's disgust, by the youngest boy.

The day wore on and the night passed and yet another morning of dogged patience.

Then at twelve o'clock the front door opened and the parlourmaid whistled a fourwheeler: luggage was reared upon it and Geoffrey Clifton emerged, gave an address to the cabman and was driven slowly away.

Newcomen gave a hearty ejaculation of relief. The coast was clear at last.

A wild impulse to call at once he restrained.

Candida had his address; if she wanted him she would send.

The departure might be a ruse and Clifton return stealthily.

Back he went to his hotel on the chance of a coming letter.

All in vain. He sat in the dismal hall, one eye
on the porter's lodge, as the posts followed swiftly
on each other.

Candida did not write.

CHAPTER XXVIII

But next morning the longed-for summons came. Just a line in Candida's characteristic hand, begging Newcomen, if possible, to call at three, adding simply the news that her husband had gone away.

The hours dragged along, and at last he started out, stopping at the first florist's to buy a great bunch of pink roses for the invalid.

The action marked the verdict of his opinion. Pity had gained the day.

When he got to the house, Susan opened the door, and her wrinkled face cleared at sight of the visitor.

"How is she?"

The old woman shook her head.

"Eh—but she's been mortal bad! She's more 'erself to-day, but I don't know, sir, if she's able to see you, surely." She hesitated, obviously hoping it were possible, and went on in her soft Devonshire voice,

"The doctor he du zay 'rest!' but she's that difficult!"—she held the door back invitingly. "Won't ye come inside, sir, whilst I go up and see?"

But as he entered the hall a voice came down over the banisters.

"If that is Captain Newcomen, please bring him straight upstairs."

The sailor needed no second bidding and, a minute afterwards, entered the sunny drawing-room.

Candida came forward slowly, to take his outstretched hand, from amidst a débris of packing that riveted his attention.

"How are you?"

A faint look of relief came into the white face at the kindly solicitude of his voice but he was shocked at the change in her since three short days ago.

For her eyes, unnaturally large, in the discoloured circles that spoke of deep ill-health, avoided his friendly gaze and on either cheek a bright spot of colour bore witness to the nervous strain of her mood.

She wore a loose tea-gown of her favourite lapis blue and the severity of the straight lines, the lack of all ornament, and the careless fashion her hair was thrown back from off her face, accentuated the unmistakable atmosphere of illness and suffering about her.

To Derrick Kilmarney, at the moment, stripped of her beauty, she would have been merely "plain."

All the vivacity, the "joie de vivre," even the purity of her bright complexion had vanished. But to the man before her, these evidences of the trial she was undergoing but added to the depths of his love and tenderness.

For Derrick Kilmarney was not one of those who stand shoulder to shoulder beside a woman through the weary hours of waiting and deformity. He could write poems to the coming child, dream fair dreams of its future, but his nature prompted him to evade all tedious responsibility, all knowledge

and sight of ugliness.

Newcomen might blunder in his speech, could never aspire to such lofty heights of romance, but he had the quality of his kind—that solid steady devotion that builds up worthy fatherhood for the race and meets physical weakness with a growing sense of protection.

So now, without waiting for her answer, he dragged a chair forward.

“Do sit down—you’re only just out of bed, you know. I’ve brought you some flowers,” he held the roses awkwardly towards her and his voice was apologetic. “I’m afraid they don’t smell much.”

His simple words relieved her of her first keen dread. Then he *didn’t* know! He didn’t blame her—he believed it all a mistake!

“Oh—thank you! they’re lovely.” She pressed her tired face against the cool blossoms and continued,

“It was good of you to come at once—I didn’t dare send before. Besides, the doctor wouldn’t hear of my getting up. As it is”—a faint smile curved her lips—“I’ve taken advantage of my nurse’s absence.”

“D’you think it’s wise?”

But she waved his objection aside.

“I can’t tell you how much I feel this—hideous business. I don’t know *how* to apologise—” She broke off with an ineffectual gesture, hopeless and ashamed, and Newcomen, watching her, decided on his course of action.

“If it hadn’t been for your illness I should call it not ‘hideous’ but ‘laughable,’” he answered quietly. “You certainly musn’t worry about *that*, Mrs. Clifton. Anyone could see—forgive me for

mentioning it—that your husband was not in a condition to know what he was talking about.”

Candida gasped, as he went on calmly,

“We needn’t trouble our heads about that silly muddle—that’s soon put right. You mustn’t think of me—what I want to know is, what are *you* going to do?”

He looked round the room, giving her time to collect herself.

“I see you’re busy packing,” he suggested.

For a moment she stared at him in silent stupefaction.

A “silly muddle”! he reduced it to that.

Then in her heart she blessed him fervently for the simple density of his intelligence!

A silly muddle! She caught her breath.

“I’m going away,” she volunteered. “Mr. Clifton left the house last night and it seemed to me the best thing to do—at once—before he returns.”

He caught the vague touch of terror in her voice.

“Quite so,” he fell into her mood—oh, wise John Newcomen!

“And where are you going?”

She fidgeted in her chair, clasping and unclasping her fingers.

“Paris first,” she admitted; “and then, some quiet place in the South—Italy perhaps—somewhere I know.”

“Won’t it be rather hot?” Still he seemed to agree with this mad project of escape, and misled by his attitude, she waxed confidential.

“I thought of that,” she nodded her head wisely, “but then it’s less likely to be discovered.”

She leaned forward, her hands pressed tightly together, her eyes shining feverishly.

"If only I could find some quiet little place—to be out of it all—to hide——"

She broke off, biting her lips, fearful lest she had said too much.

Newcomen noticed it and bravely determined this barrier of unnecessary pretence should go down between them.

"May I speak quite honestly? I mean by that as your brother might—if you had one? I don't want to hurt you and I'm not clever at talking, so will you bear this in mind and be indulgent?"

"Please," said Candida, but her face was anxious "please say anything you like."

"Then I don't think you're fit for a long journey I am sure the doctor would back me up—you mustn't do it—*just now*."

The words, spoken with unmistakable intention, were out, and under his bronzed skin the hot colour showed what the effort had caused him.

Candida sat perfectly still, the thoughts racing through her brain, astounded at his acumen in guessing her condition but never for a moment did it occur to her that he was in possession of the secret underlying the fact.

For much of Clifton's wilder ravings had passed from her memory with the shock of her accident.

"I'm glad you know," she said at last. "It makes everything simpler. That is the real reason I want to go quietly away. Also my disappearance is bound to put an end to what you call 'the muddle.'"

She gave an involuntary, pathetic little smile.

"Of course the muddle oughtn't to exist"—her voice strengthened with a touch of indignation—"it makes me mad to think you should lie for a moment under such"—she faltered but finished bravely,

"suspicion. I see now how it arose—Susan's chatter and Geoffrey's seeing you that day I was so miserable at Castellamare."

"Ah—then he did see us there? I wondered." She nodded her head, her eyes far away.

"What hurts me most"—her lips began to tremble, "I wrote to—him—" there was no need to mention the name — "he's too — busy to come."

Quite suddenly, weakened by illness and unnerved by the obvious sympathy of her listener, she buried her face in her hands and began to cry.

If ever man had murder in his heart and the intent could kill, at this moment Derrick Kilmarney's career would have met with a violent check.

For Newcomen went livid with the anger he felt.

"Hush—hush," he said brokenly, curbing his wrath with an effort, "you mustn't distress yourself like that."

He was standing beside her now, his honest soul wrung with pity.

She lifted a streaming face, totally callous to her looks, and the words forced their way through her sobs, "Not for myself—I'm past that!—but to—let another man—suffer the blame."

That was the end. That was what broke her faith!

She could have stood her lover's neglect, have blinded herself to his callous treatment of the woman he pretended to adore, forgiven his very procrastination that had brought her to this pass, but to let an innocent man stand in his guilty shoes for even an hour when once he knew, that lowered him for ever in her esteem.

On went the merciful tears, released at last.

And Newcomen, realising his powerlessness to console, set his teeth hard in silence.

At last she raised her head.

"What a *fool* I am!"

She rubbed her eyes vainly with the soaking handkerchief and pulled herself in hand.

Here was a trace of the Candida of old, and Newcomen heaved a sigh of relief.

"I suppose you'd be indignant if I contradicted you?"

His voice was tenderness itself.

Without response, she rose shakily and went to the glass, smoothing back her hair with trembling fingers.

"It's for the servants," she said to him over her shoulder—"they'll be in with the tea. Heaven knows what they think already!"

"I don't suppose Heaven troubles," said the sailor philosophically.

"Well—you know more about the place than I do." She actually gave a tremulous little laugh.

He looked at her in amazement. Was it courage or mere bravado?

He did not understand her sex enough to know that her mood resulted from sheer physical relief—the grace of those saving tears that had restored the balance to her reason.

She came back to her seat, the conviction growing upon her that she was no longer alone; that here was a friend indeed, a man whom tears could neither frighten nor annoy, who would let no obstacle stand in the way of his steady desire to help.

"Now—what am I to do?" she asked looking half-shyly up out of her reddened eyes. "I really *will* listen to your advice."

His face cleared at the words.

"I'll tell you what I've been thinking." He dotted the points off on his fingers determinedly. "You can't go on living here, that's certain; you aren't fit for a long journey, either. But your scheme of a quiet resting-place isn't a bad idea."

He frowned thoughtfully, staring down at his hands. "I suppose—" he hesitated for a moment, then encouraged by her impatient, "Go on—please say exactly what you think," he asked the question bluntly,

"Have you any idea what your husband is up to?"

"No—that is, I'm afraid——" she flushed but spoke out courageously,

"He went to his solicitors yesterday, direct from here—Susan heard the address. It means, I suppose, divorce." Newcomen nodded.

"Undoubtedly, I should say—and perhaps it's the best thing too."

He was prepared for her start of surprise.

"You can't go on living with him after this—it's impossible."

"God knows I don't wish to," her voice was fervent, "that's why I want to get away, somewhere where he can't find me."

"It's not so easy to disappear," said the sailor. He did not share Derrick's easy optimism on the subject.

"If you've made up your mind to leave him, why not do it openly?"

"Because I should never feel safe." She shuddered at the thought. "Supposing he followed me? I should live in constant dread."

But the sailor, full of the inspiration that had

come to him during her tears, stuck doggedly to his point.

"I don't believe in running away and creating fresh mystery—it's bound to complicate matters in the end. Still—I see a way out—if only you will be led?"

A note of uncertainty crept into his voice and Candida, conscious of her own self-will, coloured, suddenly hurt.

"I told you I would listen to your advice."

"I'm sorry—I didn't mean that—it's my blundering way."

Their eyes met and her face softened.

"Blunder along!"—her smile belied the words.

"Thanks—I know the very place for you—only—it's difficult to explain. It's only a cottage, you see—but my mother lived there for some years before she died. Now, of course, it's mine—and—it's a fancy I've got—it's always ready for me. There's an old man and his wife—he gardens—she cooks—all very rough I'm afraid, but it suits me when I come home. It's five miles from a town and very quiet, not far from the sea—and the garden's quite pretty."

He stopped for a moment, feeling her eyes upon his face, but avoiding her wondering gaze.

"I've often thought—of letting it. Only it's so out-of-the way—no neighbours and rather rough, you see. I don't suppose I'd ever find a tenant. But if you"—he was driving on now desperately—"if you'd—have it, for a bit—you'd be safe there, you know. I'd see to that!"

Mistrusting the reason of her silence, he went on apologetically,

"It's only a cottage, you know, but the summer's

coming—and there's an orchard—" when he felt a touch upon his arm and looking up, met her glance.

"Do you mean it?" she whispered, "do you really *mean* it?"

For through the disjointed phrases of his speech there had stirred in her vivid imagination such a picture of peace, such a haven, far from the world's cruel tongue—saving her from the journey she dreaded, the loneliness of a foreign land—just an English cottage with the old village pair—"he gardens, she cooks—" that she thought it must be a dream.

For a moment they looked at each other in silence.

"You'd have to trust me," his voice was low, "you could, couldn't you?" His eyes pleaded for him the words he could not say.

Her own filled once again with tears and she nodded her head, too moved to speak.

Then, suddenly, the cruel truth came upon her, drowning the happy dream.

"But—don't you see—it's impossible! I never thought, of course," her speech poured out in jerks.

"It would ruin you—your career," unconsciously she quoted from her lover; "it would make the mistake seem true—if I went to *your house*—don't you see?"

She stared at him blankly, bewildered by his want of foresight.

"What does that matter?" his voice was cool; "we'd know, you and I, it was all right."

He squared his shoulders resolutely.

"Let the world talk, who cares?—so long as it is the world who's in the wrong."

She rose to her feet, fighting with the sudden temptation, dimly realising all it would mean to her—seeing the sanctuary doors wide open.

“He’d divorce me then—for *you*?”

“Let him! it makes no difference—it’s simpler than raking up the past.”

Simpler! The hot blood rushed to her face.

“But why?”—she was dumbfounded at the extent of his generosity.

“Why should you dream of doing all this—for *me*?”

He hesitated, uncertain of his ground, fearing to wound her, to rouse her apprehension—this woman who already had trusted a man too far.

Yet all his honest heart cried out in him to speak the truth. Was he even right in withholding it—was it fair to the woman herself?

He set his teeth, head back, prepared to risk the rebuff—staking his all on this one throw.

“Why? Selfishness, mostly. I’m a lonely man, after all—with no one to care for.”

Purposely he looked past her, out on the faded Park.

“There’s nothing in the world so precious to me as your friendship—I should always feel grateful to be just your friend. But if, bye-and-bye—years hence perhaps—you could forget——”

She raised her tear-stained face, startled by the solemn ring in his voice.

“I would ask you—to do me the great honour—to become my wife.”

At the bitterness of her cry, realising the gulf between them, something rose in his throat and choked him.

Then as the words escaped her, “But you don’t know—you don’t know the truth!” all his love

swept over him and with a quick gesture he took her hand in his own.

"My dear," he said brokenly, "my dear—I know *everything!*"

CHAPTER XXIX

Sir Derrick Kilmarney unlocked the door and walked into the empty dower-house.

He entered his mother's drawing-room and pulling up the blinds, threw open the French windows, conscious of the musty smell an unused room so quickly acquires.

By order of the old Baronet, ever loyal to the memory of the dead woman he had learnt to love, the house was kept in the same condition as when she had left it, these many years ago, for the holiday with her boy from which she was never to return.

It was long since Derrick had crossed the threshold but to-day the desire for perfect solitude had driven him forth from the darkened Hall, by the winding pathway that led to the clematis-wreathed porch, where the red gable caught the last gleam of the setting sun e'er it sank to rest over the distant hills.

He sat down on the sofa and leaning his weary head against the cushions, amidst the old familiar surroundings he tried to face the double blow that had fallen upon him.

He had lost the election and his grandfather was dead. For it is a true adage that troubles never come

alone. It would seem as though Fortune—that fickle jace—after long years of smiling favour suddenly turns her face away from a man, leaving him helpless, from sheer astonishment, to meet one trial upon another.

Even so with Derrick Kilmarney. Events had moved so swiftly, they seemed past his comprehension.

Like a man in a dream he had been impelled forward, the centre figure of the double catastrophe.

But under the numbness of the shock a question pricked him and would not be denied—the question of his own responsibility.

If the old man had been better looked after—if he had never taken that last fatal ride, would the blinds still be down in the silent house beyond?

The election touched a less painful note, for the greater sorrow had blunted awhile his vanity; and the slender majority of Johnstone-Biggs as compared with the last poll was a virtual triumph for the party he served.

Still personally he had failed.

All his brilliant oratory, the fascination of his manner, the influence of social backers and Dirke's powerful right arm could not avail against the brewer's son.

He was conscious too that during the last few days the tide had turned against him and the knowledge that the scandal he had so vainly denied was due to his own indiscretion made it none the pleasanter to bear.

His freedom from Lady Mary Dirke had been bought at too heavy a price!

And at the name, his thoughts instinctively turned

back to his grandfather.

For his grandfather had known!

He was haunted by the memory of the flushed old face, the eyes brilliant with fever, against the hard pillow in the great four-post bed.

He could see the curtainless windows, the bare soldier-like room that cried aloud Sir George's last protest against the luxury of the age.

On the high mantel-shelf, sole ornament that flanked the great bronze clock, stood a portrait of Derrick as a boy, gazing with wide honest eyes down upon the scene.

The little fellow stood there, legs apart, his hunting crop in his hand, in all the dignity of first breeches and boots and over it hung the "brush" that his childish pluck had gained him and which had been the crowning laurel of the day.

In his delirium the old man's mind had leapt the intermediate years. He was back in the days when his grandson's horsemanship had been his keen delight.

Once, as the words babbled unceasingly from his lips, Derrick had caught the phrase,

"A good lad—rides straight—his father over again!" And with that awful shadow hanging across the bed, the truth had forced its way into the listener's mind; and the tribute had hurt him more than the hardest word of blame.

Added to this had come the knowledge that Sir George not only suspected but thoroughly realised the secret of his so-called friendship with the Dirkes. For from the silent lips, fever had stolen the key of reticence, and once with a touch of his old strength Sir George had struggled up in bed.

"Damn her—she's ruined my boy!" and Derrick in his new mood of tardy repentance knew that the greater fault was his.

Procrastination and his hatred of all responsibility, the specious reasoning with which he deceived himself, the easy creed that covered his moral weakness—that had ruined him, besides Mary Dirke.

He had not "ridden straight" was not his "father over again."

He looked at the keen soldier face on the table beside him, where his mother's basket lay, the work she had left unfinished still folded within it.

How often as a little lad would he sit at her feet, gazing up at that silver frame, as she mended his ragged socks out of that very basket beyond, and told him of his father and his father's views of life.

What would she say now—what would she think of their son?

His thoughts turned to Candida—ill and alone; unconscious probably of the sorrow that beset him, fretting over his absence, wondering at the delay.

And then, in his loneliness, like a ray of sunshine from above, came the thought of her consolation, the loving touch of the little hands, the sympathy of the sweet blue eyes.

And out of the ruin where he stood he realised that love was left him—the love of a true woman.

She was his, body and soul, her whole life wrapped up in his welfare.

And now there were no barriers to overcome.

His grandfather with his stern old creed had

passed away and the younger man belonged to his own indulgent generation.

No more a servant of the public, his morals concerned himself alone.

He could afford to laugh at scandal—he, Sir Derrick Kilmarney, the head of his house. He knew the world would forgive, that easy world, ever indulgent where wealth paved the way hand-in-hand with birth; he knew its smiling snobbism, its love of a new excitement. He had no fear of the world.

He thought of Geoffrey Clifton and sneered as the sense of his new power rose up within him. Let the dreary student divorce his wife!—it was but to set her free—free to become another's.

For through it all there ran one finer thread, a touch of that old spirit of atonement that had stirred within him in his parting scene with Candida.

Then and there, with the influence of the dead about him, he took a solemn vow.

Marriage—that should atone!

He would marry Candida and insist on her open recognition.

The knowledge of the surprise to his own immediate set but spurred him on, and the sense of loneliness that had crushed him during the hours of grief added its subtle note to his decision.

The old love of change, the passion for freedom seemed dead within him and his whole soul cried out for companionship, for someone whose love he could trust, on whose sympathy he could rely; someone who belonged to him! Politics he was sick of. He had had his one throw and the dice

had come up blank. The life of a country gentleman was good enough for him, the life his fathers had lived before him.

He began to picture Candida the mistress of the Hall; her bright face smiling at him from under the long row of painted beauties who framed the vaulted room.

She was worthy to take her place among them—worthy too, he told himself, to be a mother of the race.

He had not even that secret misgiving that his wife might not bear him a child; and at the thought, a sudden longing rose for the sound of little footsteps pattering across the oak, young laughter waking the echoes where ghostly silence lay.

Again he heard Sir George's voice and caught the speaker's desire.

"Time you married, Derry."

It was true. He nodded his head, facing the great decision of his life, strung afresh by the knowledge that he held his title in trust, that his duty plainly was to hand it on to another.

Yes, he would do it—there should be no regret—henceforth he would "ride straight," Candida by his side.

And a quick sadness seized him that the dead could not hear his vow—that awful knowledge that there was no reaching out across the silent gulf—that the opportunity had passed—to all Eternity!

But a gleam of sunshine stole into the room, all the more vivid for the shower that was over, and rising to his feet the new Baronet stepped down into the garden.

There stood the old dove-cot, where as a child he

would draw himself up on tiptoe to peep into the nests; there again beside the laurel hedge was the strip of ground he had fondly called his own. Out of the wreck of time, a double pink daisy, last of his cherished plants, flowered alone.

Now all was his. The vast Park, with its ancient associations where in the days gone by a King had deigned to hunt, guest of that proud Sir Deryck, whose marble effigy still lay in the tiny chapel, though the faith had changed with the changing years—all his: the hall with its history, its treasury of paintings, and books and ancient armoury and the still subtler inheritance of the race who had reigned before him.

The King was dead—long live the King!

He would start worthily—be his “father over again.”

Filled with this determination, he closed the windows ~~closed~~ and turned in the direction of the Hall.

Not until the funeral was over could he begin this work of reparation, but he could write to Candida, explaining all, bidding her trust in him and look forward to a not far distant day of consolation.

The thought of Newcomen flashed across him and unconsciously he smiled—touched by the picture of such worthiness under the shadow of suspicion. A good chap—but strangely narrow—sailors were often so. It even occurred to him it might prove a subtle lesson; for at the bottom of his heart a vague jealousy bade him resent the other's well-meaning interference.

As he reached the steps that led to the fine old portico, he saw the postman's figure in the drive.

He went back and took the letters from him as the man touched his cap with a respectful sympathy he dared not put into words.

The topmost envelope from his solicitors gave him a curious start.

"Sir Derrick Kilmarney, 'Bart.'"

Why—so he was! how odd it looked.

The pile was heavy—condolences pouring in, and he went into the house, avoiding the library with that painful empty chair and passed into the dining-room beyond.

He opened the letters quickly, skimming them through, all couched in the same formal terms of sympathy.

Then he came to Candida's.

He looked at the envelope curiously.

"Derrick Kilmarney, Esq."

And as he read on, it was obvious she was unaware of his loss, had not even realised the shattering of his political ambitions.

His lips had smiled tenderly as he broke the letter open, foreseeing reproaches, possibly anger, an outburst of Candida's spirit; but the shock of her first words sobered him. She could not be in earnest!

Omitting all orthodox commencement the letter opened simply.

"By the time this reaches you, I shall have gone—I pray God—out of your life for ever."

Conscious of his new decision concerning her, tired out with sleepless nights, all he felt was a sense of bewilderment.

He read on slowly by the fading light.

With characteristic honesty she related her interview with Newcomen, omitting nothing, unconsciously revealing her own censure on her lover's

"inexplicable conduct."

She wrote laboriously, as a child might write, her whole mind set on being understood, on making her meaning clear.

"Love, to me, is the only possible excuse for conduct such as ours and when love is tarnished by any want of respect—something goes out of it, some redeeming purity.

"And that, Derry, is what has happened.

"It is hard to write, more bitter than I can believe to acknowledge—but you have broken my faith in yourself—I do not think I could *ever* trust you again."

Derrick's face whitened as he read. There was no doubting the deadly earnestness of the words.

"It may be more—convenient, to act as you are doing; I do not understand—it may be the way of the world—but the world is nothing to me compared to my own sense of right and wrong. I see now, from the very beginning it has all been wrong—*all*! Not to you, perhaps, who lived up to your own ideals, but consciously I sinned against my firmest principles, deceiving myself that love would wipe out the stain.

"Because it was all *so sweet*—because I loved you so, I tried to convince myself your reasoning was my own; that the old ethics had failed, that the thinkers of to-day accepted a new morality.

"And now I see it was all a lie.

"Nothing can make dishonour good, or find a new name for sin.

"I do not blame you—I still believe you are honest in your professedly 'modern' beliefs. It is I who have fallen away voluntarily from the old clean views of love and honour—the views my father held."

The reading man winced. "I think I should never have seen this so clearly had it not been for this terrible mistake, this blame that has fallen so unjustly on another.

"But the fact that you can convince yourself that it is right to let an innocent man lie for an hour under the shadow of your own wrong-doing has shattered all my faith in you—in your sense of honour and superior powers of judgment.

"And if I cannot trust you, on what can I pin my hope? What is to happen to me and the child that is born of our love, in the long years ahead?

"When the first sweetness has died away and monotony takes its place, what link can hold us together—you and I?

"Not my love alone, with all its faithfulness, nor the child, without name, that may stand beside us.

"Marriage does not enter into your 'new morality.' You say yourself 'Love must be free.'

"Even if in time you should modify your views, I would never be a drag upon your life, knowing that to lay but a finger on your freedom would be to break the last bond between us.

"Oh, Derry, Derry—it is good-bye—I dare not risk it, loving much, but trusting not at all.

"I pray God you may be happy and your life one long success.

"But for me there is no part in it. You have opened my eyes at last.

"For Love is *not* your god.

"Love involves sacrifice, responsibility and as the years roll on, the test of fidelity.

"The shrine you worship at is Freedom.

"That is your god—the figure of Liberty!

"And I, loving you, realise the end—I will not

place one stone upon your path.

"I give you, with both hands, in memory of all our love together, what is still dearer to you—freedom!"

THE END

y of all
you—